GREEK CIVILIZATION

From Euripides to Alexandria

André Bonnard

SECOND IMPRESSION

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André Bonnard, the great Swiss Hellenist, lived just long enough to complete this, the third and concluding volume of his comprehensive study of Greek civilization. It is in every way a worthy successor to the volume that was described as 'the best popular introduction to Greek civilization that I have ever read' (Professor J. A. K. Thomson), and 'a fresh book, beautiful and truthful' (Stevie Smith).

This last volume covers the age of decline, the two centuries (the 4th and 3rd B.C.) that witnessed the death of the city states which were the social framework of the classical age. Demosthenes, their champion, was foredoomed to defeat, and the genius of Alexander, and of his father Philip, dealt them a mortal blow, though at the same time it was Alexander who created the shape of the modern state. During these two centuries there were philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, still trying to restore the old city state; but it was Plato who substituted for the earthly city a divine world where all would be gathered after death, thus pre-figuring the Heavenly City. In this way Greek civilization, as it declined, prepared the way for Christianity.

The first chapters are dedicated, however, to Euripides, a poet of the classical age who nevertheless foreshadows the decline. The chapters that follow include the study of Thucydides, Demosthenes, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander, the first two Ptolemies, Alexandrian astronomy (Aristarchus), geography (Pytheas and Eratosthenes), medical science, Archimedes, and the poetry of Callimachus, Apollonius and Theocritus. The book ends with a chapter on Epicurus.

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GREEK CIVILIZATION

From Euripides to Alexandria

TRANSLATED BY R. C. KNIGHT

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Several chapters owe a great deal to the help of colleagues in the Classics, Zoology, Geography and Mathematics Departments of the University College of Swansea. The quotations of classical authors were for the most part identified, and the translations transcribed, by Miss Irene Clephane. The translator of the book remains responsible for any remaining errors, though not for any of the views expressed by the author.

R. C. K. *June,* 1961

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For Chapter I: *Euripides*, Vol. IV, translated by Arthur S. Way (Loeb Classical Library). London and New York, 1925.

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For Chapter III: *Euripides*, Vol. III, translated by Arthur S. Way (Loeb Classical Library). London and New York, 1912.

For Chapter IV: Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, translated by Rex Warner (Penguin Classics). London, Penguin Books, 1954.

For Chapter V: *The Third Philippic: The Orations of Demosthenes* (Everyman Library). London, J. M. Dent & Sons; New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1954
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CONTENTS

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE page 7

I Decline and Discovery: The *Medea* of Euripides 15

II The Tragedy of *Iphigenia at Aulis* 27

III The Drama of the *Bacchae* 39

IV Thucydides and the War of the City-states 52

V Demosthenes and the End of the World of City-states 64

VI The Grand Political Design of Plato 75

VII Plato: Beauty and Illusion 88

VIII Aristotle and the World of Living Creatures 114

IX Alexander: The Vision of the Brotherhood of Man 134

X Anarchy in the Guise of Order: The First Two Ptolemies 159

XI The Reign of Books: Alexandria, its Library and Museum 170

XII Alexandrian Astronomy: Aristarchus of Samos 181

XIII Geography: Pytheas and Eratosthenes 189

XIV Medical Science. A Word on Archimedes. Hero and his Steam-Engine 198

XV Back to Poetry: Callimachus, Apollonius 209

XVI The Paradise of Theocritus 229

XVII Other Escapisms: Herodas and Realistic Mime, the Novel—*Daphnis and Chloe* 246

XVIII Epicurus and the Salvation of Man 259

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE 282

INDEX 284

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. *Medea killing her children. Apulian amphora* (*detail*) 16 *and* 17
2. *Figure of a girl* 16 *and* 17
3. *Fragment of a Bacchic procession* 32 *and* 33
4. *Maenad, after Scopas* (4*th Century B.C.*) 32 *and* 33
5. *Funerary stele of Dexileos in the Ceramicus, Athens* (394 *B.C.*) 32 *and* 33
6. *White lecythus of the late* 5*th Century B.C.* 32 *and* 33
7. *Profile of a statue of Demosthenes* (*detail*), 280 *B.C.* 48 *and* 49
8. *Head of Demosthenes* 48 *and* 49
9. *The people of Athens crowned by Democracy: stele discovered in the Agora* (336 *B.C.*) 64 *and* 65
10. *Bust of Alexander as a young man, by Lysippus* (*middle of* 4*th Century*) 64 *and* 65
11. *Bust of Plato* 64 *and* 65
12. *Bust of Plato* 64 *and* 65
13. *Crocodile on the banks of the Nile* 80 *and* 81
14. *Marabou stork* 80 *and* 81
15. *Egyptian birds* 96 *and* 97
16. *Girl of Antium* (*Hellenistic period*) 96 *and* 97
17. *Alexander the Great* 96 *and* 97
18. *Ruins of Persepolis: the Apadana. The palaces of Darius and Xerxes in the background* 96 *and* 97
19. *Ruins of Persepolis:* 36 *columns each* 20 *metres high* (18 *metres in their present state*) 112 *and* 113
20. *Persepolis: tribute-bearers leading a camel, bas-relief from stairway of Xerxes, Apadana* 112 *and* 113
21. *Battle of Arbela: Darius in battle against Alexander. Mosaic from Pompeii* 128 *and* 129
22. *Battle of Arbela: Alexander in battle against Darius. Mosaic from Pompeii* 128 *and* 129
23. *Ptolemy I* 144 *and* 145

24. *Graeco-Buddhist art: the Hadda Buddha* 144 *and* 145

25. *Papyrus plants in the Arethusa fountain, Syracuse* 160 *and* 161

26. *The end of a manuscript of Menander (the last lines contain the name of the poet and the title of the play,* The Bad-Tempered Man*)* 160 *and* 161

27. *Egyptian landscape, Fayum* 176 *and* 177

28. *Egyptian bas-relief, Karnak* 176 *and* 177

29. *The Eros of Nikopol (2nd Century B.C.)* 192 *and* 193

30. *The ship Argo: detail from a cist (4th Century B.C.)* 192 *and* 193

31. *Olive tree, with Agrigento in the background* 208 *and* 209

32. *Near Agrigento: a shepherd with his sheep* 208 *and* 209

33. *Flora gathering flowers, Pompeii* 224 *and* 225

34. *Engraving on the back of a bronze mirror from Corinth* 224 *and* 225

35. *Epicurus* 240 *and* 241

36. *Egyptian scene* 240 *and* 241

CHAPTER ONE

DECLINE AND DISCOVERY: THE *MEDEA* OF EURIPIDES

Civilizations in their development follow the same progression as natural things like plants. They germinate, come to life, grow; they unfold in the time of their classicism; then they fade, age, decline and die. Yet perhaps they never die altogether; they are still there for future ages, as a nostalgia, a clamorous memory of the past, and it sometimes happens that succeeding generations model on them their own new thoughts and creations. And so they are, even in their failure, hopes which may have been blighted so far, but not destroyed; hopes that live on, and act in the memory of mankind.

The decline of any civilization is always, to my mind, a period of the greatest interest. In the first place because such periods show clearly—more clearly than the beginnings, the births, which always are wrapped in obscurity—for what reasons, and under what conditions, human communities create cultural values, and what they lose when these disappear.

Moreover these periods of decline, these 'down-grades' of civilizations, are never purely negative and barren—they are still engaged in new creation, still presenting men with new, and often more complex, problems. It is as if communities, as they age, suddenly find it harder to breathe, to act, and to live. As the civilization disintegrates that was their natural climate—their oxygen—as the beliefs totter that were their daily sustenance, rather than die they seek for new methods of thinking, fabricate new worlds of poetry and wisdom, and invent (the more they age, the more they invent) new reasons for hoping, fresh certainties. Thus the periods of decline are, equally, periods of discovery. Civilizations are transformed, rather than dying; their life is a constant renaissance.

For that matter, when the sun sinks over the Jura, is not the same sun at the same moment rising on the other side of the ocean to bring men there the promise of a new day?

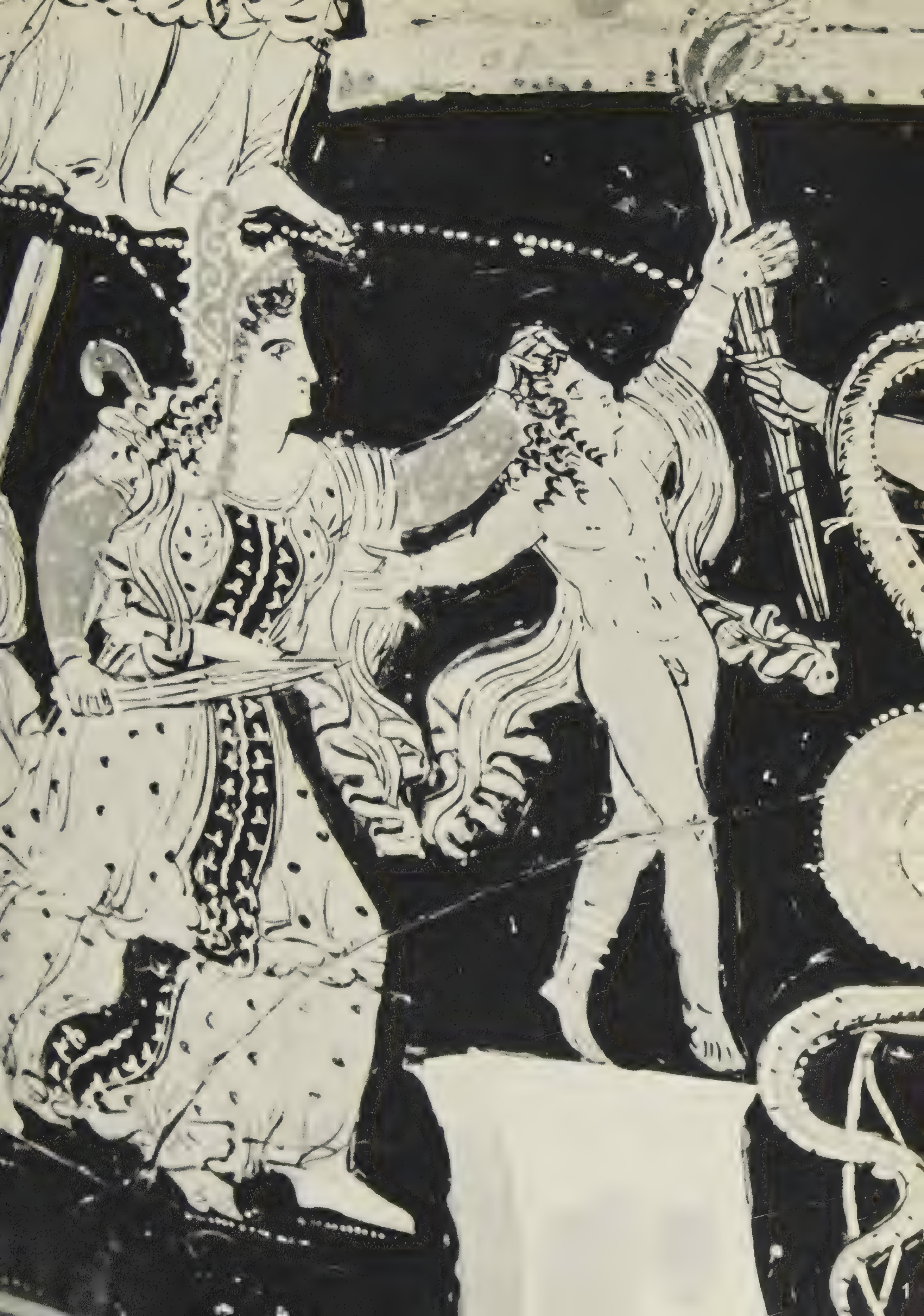
This volume will take in two centuries that were very dark for the Hellenic world, the fourth and the third before the Christian era. These are the centuries that witness the death of the city-states—the social framework of the classical age, narrow but exact. Demosthenes their champion was foredoomed to defeat. The genius of Alexander—and his father Philip before him—dealt them a mortal blow. But Alexander did not merely destroy the city, he created the new shape of the modern state. After his astonishing adventure, the East remained thronged with vast kingdoms under rulers, and dynasties, like those of the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucidae in Asia.

Yet during these same centuries two great philosophers were still endeavouring to restore the old city-state of antiquity, and set it up on new foundations. Plato above all, Aristotle also, and others after them. But these attempts were short-lived. Plato himself tried a more ambitious enterprise—he substituted for the earthly city, for the corrupt democracy of citizens, a divine world where all souls would be gathered after death, in a life beyond the grave prefiguring the Heavenly City, the Kingdom of Heaven. So it came about that Greek civilization, even as it deteriorated, was, by deep-reaching revolutions of society and thought, preparing the way for Christianity. This is one of the essential lines of development to be discerned in the fourth and third centuries B.C.

But that will be only one of the aspects that this volume will exhibit. The old Greek civilization, the true, pristine civilization of the fifth century, the 'pagan' civilization of the Greek people, producer of classical works in profusion from 450 to 400—that civilization is not yet at its last gasp. To describe the political context of its decline, we need only draw on the work of a historian, a Greek head if ever there was one, clearsighted and hard, Thucydides—a thinker and artist who has brilliantly shown how, beginning with the last third of the fifth century, war between Greeks destroyed the world of the city-states more surely than Philip and Alexander.

We shall also see again the old struggle of the Greek people—a struggle born with the race (compare Odysseus)—to explain the world, and learn its laws, in order to make use of them and become its master. This science of the laws of the universe drew lustre in the classical age from the great name of Hippocrates, who was (for all the mockery of Molière) the authentic father of modern medicine. During the decline of Greek civilization, science was almost the only human activity to be still progressing. It formulated hypotheses—in astronomy, biology, or mechanics for example—which were to be taken up on the further side of that sterile parenthesis, the Roman era and the Middle Ages, based on experiment and reason by the savants of the Renaissance, and at last gloriously overtaken and left behind, in every direction, by the savants of the scientific age we live in today.

1. *Medea killing her children. Apulian amphora. Munich, Antikensammlungen*



Lastly, let us not forget the poets. Further away from the people than in the classical age, the Alexandrian poets created poetic universes by way of escape from the realities of their times, which often were too cruel to face; holidays, we might say, granted to the toil of man; paradises (great gardens, for that is the Greek meaning of the word), but earthly paradises, far removed from Plato's paradise of souls. Far removed, and perhaps not less imaginary.

That is part of what I shall set out to show.

◎

But to give sharper detail to this notion of 'decline', which I shall attempt to define, and which will overshadow the whole work, I shall dedicate the first chapters of my survey to a poet of the Athenian golden age (the second half of the fifth century)—the tragic poet Euripides.

Let me explain. I shall observe first of all that the tragedy of Euripides has been no less decried than idolized: decried by the poet's own contemporaries, and also by nineteenth-century criticism, by Nietzsche for instance; idolized by the generations at the close of antiquity, who loved and read him much more than Aeschylus and Sophocles, and acted his plays right across the vast Orient that Alexander had overrun. Today Euripides still has enthusiasts—who, even while admitting what is weak or faulty in his poorer plays, hail in him the writer of certain of the master-works of the tragic stage. Is it not to him that we owe the *Phèdre* of Racine—the poet who loved him from boyhood, continued his work, and brought it to fruition?

This diversity of judgments over Euripides gives us an inkling of the double character of his genius: his ambivalence, to use the fashionable term. In one sense Euripides does destroy tragedy, as Nietzsche asserted. He intellectualizes it, he simplifies it, on the one hand by the use of rather wooden devices in the prologue and the dénouement, on the other by bringing into it debates after the fashion of the sophists, clashes of ideas, often misplaced, concerning the problems of his time—of our time too, as it happens. Here, perhaps, Euripides is paying the price of his profound humanity: he is too accessible to every difficulty and every enquiry of man, to forbear instituting a debate whenever occasion offers, on slavery, on the status of woman, on the equality of the sexes, and most of all on the part played in our lives by the gods, on the nature of the gods, or of chance. Euripides is open to every interest of mankind. He is involved in the life of his time and in all that perturbs it, involved in the wretchedness and the solitude of the creature. Euripides is always *disponible*: only too much so. He does not know how to forget his feelings and efface their expression, when any situation touches him too deeply.

2. *Figure of a girl. Rome, National Museum*

Hence certain scenes sometimes, unrelated to the action of the tragedy, which appear as blemishes in his work.

These scenes, and the poorer plays in which they occur, are the negative side of an age of decline.

But let us turn to the positive side, the creative element, in the same poet. If love for fellow-creatures sometimes makes Euripides institute discussions on human activities which slow down the action of the play, the same love also sends him off to explore tragic territories unknown to his predecessors, and to create plots in which the place taken by the gods in our lives is not forgotten, but the nature of man is even more clearly accounted for by the interplay of the passions lodged within his breast, crushing and destroying him thanks to the pitiable weakness of his will. In other words, Euripides discovers the internal springs of tragedy in the heart of man, the tragedy of the passions which drive and often break us.

This discovery, which became the food of lyrical poetry, and then, from the close of antiquity, of the novel, and then of modern tragedy from its birth in the Renaissance, is one of the most important in the history of literature. Aeschylus and Sophocles had scarcely guessed its possibility.

Euripides may then be called the poet of decline, but only in so far as any decline is at the same time the prelude to a renewal. He is not only, if at all, the demolisher of ancient tragedy: he prolongs its life, rejuvenates it, hands it on to our Renaissance, and humanizes it with all the vitality of our many-sided hearts.

In Aeschylus and Sophocles, tragedy threatened the hero from without, he was stricken down by the gods: the bombs fell from the heavens. Euripides, nearer to us always and in everything (what is there nearer to us than our own hearts?), places tragedy in the depths of those hearts, depths we know so ill. For him bombs do not fall from the sky only; it is the human heart that is an explosive.

Of this tragedy that strikes us down by making use of our own passions (was there ever discovery more prodigious?) I shall rapidly give an example, that of *Medea.*

◎

Medea is a woman abandoned by her husband. The Nurse, who opens the play, in her garrulous style provides us with the facts we need, telling us all the circumstances of his desertion. This husband, Jason, who is leaving her with two children, had been loved by her in the savage country, Colchis, where they first met. Medea was the king's daughter, and she helped Jason when he came to Colchis in search of the Golden Fleece. Betraying her father, she saved him and followed him back to Greece, to Corinth, where we find her now. But Jason is about to marry the king of Corinth's daughter, because that marriage will be more useful to him than the marriage he contracted with a foreign woman. Medea is callously sacrificed. The Nurse says of her:

Now all is hatred: love is sickness-stricken.
For Jason, traitor to his babes and her,
My mistress, weddeth with a child of kings.[1]

How does Medea react to this betrayal? First, whole days spent in tears—speechless despair, laments over her father and the country she has forsaken. Then the Nurse puts in one or two more sinister touches. 'She loathes her babes.' Later, 'Grim is her spirit. . . . Dangerous is she.'[2] So our pity for Medea is already mingled with anxiety. The queen is offered to us as an enigma. Of the circumstances of her betrayal we know everything, but of her, nothing, except that she is intractable and violent. The fate that will strike her is within her, in a zone as yet unknown to herself, or to us.

The poet lengthens out this overture still further by a scene between the Nurse and an old slave who is bringing the children back from their gymnastics. The tragic note does not invade the drama all at once, it infiltrates insidiously. Here we have a conversation between two servants devoted to their mistress, in the most everyday style. One relates to the other gossip heard at the fountain. This is humdrum daily life, and the presence of the children would give us pleasure, were it not that certain words about them let slip by the Nurse, bring a first gleam of horror into all this ordinariness.

Keep these apart to the uttermost . . .
For late I saw her glare, as glares a bull,
On these, as 'twere for mischief,[3]

she says to the old slave. The suddenly a cry comes from the palace—Medea calls aloud for death. 'Dear children,' whispers the Nurse, 'go not near her,' and a little later, meditating by herself:

What deeds shall be dared of that soul,
So haughty, when wrong's goads pierce her?[4]

So the object of our fears grows ever clearer—fate has begun to move, but its course depends on an impulse hidden in the heart of Medea. There lies the mainspring of the tragic action.

The chorus of the tragedy makes its entrance in the simplest possible way. It is composed of women, who are passing by, and stop at these strange cries still issuing from the palace. They are troubled, ask what they mean, and speak their sympathy. The chorus in tragedy is the street running side by side with the drama, the street with all its curiosity, its good-heartedness, its easily-moved pity. Kindly souls, but they must not be expected to compromise themselves; they are sorry for Medea, because she is a woman like themselves—but she is a foreigner, and a princess, and they will take good care not to be mixed up in this quarrel between the great ones of the earth. They are indignant against both sides, and they pray the gods that the peace of their homes may be preserved; but they will not throw themselves into the fray. Euripides uses these women, just a trifle sentimental and given to moralizing, to give scale to his passionate Medea. . . . He loves to show in parallel lines the tragedy of great destinies, and the humdrum paths of simple people. It is an effect of contrast, but at the same time an effect of identity; for Medea too is a simple woman. Here we touch what may be called the nearness of tragedy everywhere in Euripides.

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[1] *Euripides*, translated by Arthur S. Way, Loeb Classical Library, 1925, Vol. IV, p. 285.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 287. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 291. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 293.

At length Medea comes out of the palace and confronts the pitying interest of the chorus. Quite a different woman from the one we expected: a strange woman indeed. In the palace she moaned and cursed: before these women of the people, in the common day of the street, she pulls herself together and regains self-control. Not complaint now, but bitterness alone befits her dignity. The bitterness of being a foreigner in this city, and treated as such by her own husband; above all else, the bitterness of being a woman and being basely treated in accordance with the base standing of women, when in truth no soul is more manlike than her own. These wonderful men, so proud of their courage in fight, so scornful of the quiet life of women in the home. 'Unreasoning fools,' she cries to the chorus:

Thrice would I under shield
Stand, rather than bear childbirth-peril once.[1]

Woman has her field of battle—the bed. At least she has the right to defend it.

Woman quails at every peril,
Faint-heart to face the fray and look on steel;
But when in wedlock rights she suffers wrong,
No spirit more bloodthirsty shall be found.[2]

With such ringing words she makes the chorus feel pride in their womanhood; then she demands every woman's support in the struggle she has to wage against man. She easily makes them promise complicity and silence.

This scene provides a first proof of the power of Medea. Medea suffers, but she is strong, and her self-control equals her authority over others.

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 303.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 305.

Next she comes face to face with a man, a declared adversary—Creon, king of Corinth, who comes to inform her of her banishment. Against this sentence Medea will fight. Here we learn to understand the strange power of fascination that she can exert over men. The reason for it is that rare thing, extreme passion joined with extreme intelligence. In Medea passion, far from disturbing her mind, only gives it greater clarity. Euripides has observed most truly here—in his characters passion is not always blinding (as proverbial wisdom would have it), it can make them clear-sighted. Medea's mind can become more powerful in the very course of one of her rages. Never will she lose sight of the goal she has to reach, for which she is even capable of coldly turning to her advantage a situation involving passion. In this scene with the king, she hardly needs to play a part—all she does is to suffer in front of him, but her suffering is kept within the exact limits that will make it likely to move Creon without alarming him. This is what I have called making intelligent use of her passion. Sometimes she allows herself a touch of irony—'Wed and be happy!' As a whole, the scene is one of genuine, but controlled, passion; but at the same time, underneath the authentic pain, we feel rising in her, as speech follows speech, an extraordinary joy at feeling herself the stronger—the joy of fighting and winning. In this scene, Medea has obtained what she needs for her vengeance—a single day's reprieve. She has control of the action; but what will she do with it? All depends on what she is, and that as yet we do not know; the enigma of her being is still entire.

One thing is certain: Medea will kill. So far, she looks forward to no vengeance other than that of killing her enemies. 'Three foes will I lay dead', she cries to the chorus, 'The father, and the daughter, and mine husband.'[1] Her imagination takes wing: she sees herself starting a great fire, or creeping sword in hand to the bridal chamber; and she exults—'See, they are dead!' She tastes now, in advance, all the joys of murder; and she voices her blood-lust with such an ecstasy of triumph, that the chorus, far from recoiling in horror as we might expect, are somehow caught up by the martial strains, exclaiming:

Upward and back to their fountains the sacred rivers are
stealing . . .
For woman the old-time story is ended. . . .[2]

All at once Jason enters, cold and formal. This scene has been held back until now, for our greater pleasure. Not until we had been filled with the sense of Medea's strength, must she be put into conflict with that other, equal, strength—Jason. Medea's fire and Jason's ice.

Jason loves nothing, he comes before us as the complete egoist. Jason is a cynic who has been to school with the sophists and who speaks their language. His arguments are impeccable, even when they attain to paradox. Medea has helped him—he admits it, and as he says 'he finds no fault in that'. But then, Medea loved him. It is to love, to Cypris, that he owes a degree of gratitude; if, that is, love requires to be thanked—for love is free, or it is nothing.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 313. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 317.

Besides, Medea has received as much as she has given, and more—in particular, the privilege of living not in a land of barbarians, where brute force reigns, but in a land of Greeks, where justice is supreme. And thus the word justice comes out of Jason's lips: he can appropriate the most sacred words with boundless assurance. As for his remarrying, Jason justifies that by his love for his children. He says so, and proves it—his children will benefit in wealth and in good upbringing, that is to say materially and morally, from the exalted match he is making. Medea herself would admit as much if she could think of anything but her marriage rights. For that matter, Jason will conduct himself honourably—when he breaks with a woman, he offers her money and letters of recommendation for overseas. There are times when perfect gentleman equals perfect cad.

In Jason's character the analysis of egoism is carried to an unexampled degree of refinement. This is not the only play of Euripides in which he has taken pleasure in laying bare this root of the greater part of our acts. A character like Jason does not merely interest us, it disturbs; because we find, avowed in him, an unavowed part of ourselves. It is one of the great secrets of Euripides' art to utter what we repress.

All through this scene, Medea has barely ruffled Jason. Jason, loving nothing, is invulnerable. Only love makes for vulnerability, as Medea knows only too well. But does Jason really love nothing? He lets slip one expression about his children, an expression of barefaced cynicism like all that drops from his lips:

Nor eager I to multiply mine offspring:
Suffice those born to me: no fault in them. . . .[1]

But this expression has revealed his secret, and Medea does not forget it. So, from this scene in which she has drunk the dregs of humiliation, and battered in vain against the massy egoism of Jason, Medea—always strong to wrest back the advantage—carries off one weapon against him: Jason is attached to his children. That is enough. From Jason's transient triumph will proceed, logically, the triumph of Medea.

I pass over one scene—the scene with Aegeus, king of Athens, an old friend of Medea, whom she allows to persuade her to accept the asylum he offers in case of need. In the theatre, scenes like this give characters and audience the time to let certain thoughts work slowly in them—thoughts that are too weighty, in this case the killing of the children. We also find in it an example of the way destiny (or should we say circumstances?) will sometimes abet our passions. Life does offer these chances; but the important thing is for Medea to snatch this one. She is not afraid of dying after her crime, but she does want to be able to enjoy her vengeance. Therefore she accepts Aegeus' hospitality,

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 325.

Now, after this conversation which ensures her safety from her enemies, Medea in a flash understands what it is she wants. First, she will use her children to bait a trap for Jason's bride: they shall carry her the poisoned gifts that will cause her death. Then she will kill the children. That is the only way she can hit at Jason. What matter if the same blow strikes her? Only thus can she make manifest her strength. . . . All this she proclaims to the chorus, in a mixture of jubilation and horror, of tears and cries of triumph. The prologue of the play had warned us that Medea's passion might turn against her children, and yet we find it inconceivable that the presentiment should become reality. The necessity of killing them does not yet seem to us evident in Medea herself. We say, with the chorus:

Canst thou steel
Thy breast when thy children kneel,
To crimson thy hand, with unyearning
Heart for thy darlings slain?[1]

However her plans begin to succeed with terrible accuracy. She lures Jason easily into the pitfall of a reconciliation. In this scene she probes his paternal heart until she finds it capable of feeling underneath the crust of egoism; with quivering joy, with radiant pleasure under her cloak of hypocrisy, she finds that at last she has put her finger on a crack, in the impenetrable block that is Jason, through which the knife may pass. With joy, and horror—for Jason's love for his sons is also the sentence that condemns them, and leaves her bereft as well.

Then, left alone with them, the final conflict begins in her. They are before her, with their 'dear eyes', their 'last smile'; she is still entirely free to decree their life or their death. She clasps them in her arms, and covers them with kisses.

O dearest hand, O lips most dear to me . . .
Blessings be on you—there! . . .
O sweet embrace!
O children's roseleaf skin, O balmy breath!
Away, away![2]

Then she puts them from her, and waves them back into the house.

The dramatic conflict, for the first time in any play, has been narrowed down and limited to the confines of one human heart. Six times, wave meeting wave, maternal love and the demon of vengeance clash within the walls of this heart, which seems to be at once of flesh and steel. For a moment love appears to conquer: 'They will be thy joy!' But the demon attacks with a new weapon, convincing Medea that it is too late, that she is no longer free to choose, whispering that the thing is 'as good as done!'. It is one of the devil's commonest snares, to make us believe that we have lost our freedom just in order to make us lose it. One more revulsion, and she yields to the call of murder; the internal action has reached its dénouement. Medea concludes it with a line that has become famous.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 351. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 367.

Θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων
But passion overmastereth sober thought.[1]

Thumos, 'passion', is the furious demon that dwells within her, her murderous hate.

As for the external action, it follows with the speed of lightning.

Medea has regained self-control. She waits calmly for the news of her rival's murder. When a servant comes to relate the story, she listens with ghastly joy. The story is told with a brilliance almost unbearable; the picture of the little princess, the doll-like figure that Jason has preferred to the greatness of Medea, glitters like a bead—but the bead is soon to be ground underfoot. First, she turns away at the sight of her rival's children; but, won over by the gifts, she cannot wait to try on the diadem and the veil. The scene before the mirror is marvellously graceful, in its very fragility. Suddenly pain seizes her. The maids for a moment think it is an epileptic fit; then comes that flame springing from her forehead—the rest is horror.

Medea hears the story with ecstasy, savouring its atrocity to the last drop. Then comes a sudden start—up and doing! An act awaits her, and she hastens to perform it. A few last pangs for the children she loves; then she stiffens, and the case is closed.

She kills while the chorus sings, invoking the glory of the sun. The poet spares us the account of the children's death—though perhaps an account would give our nerves release at moments, whereas shrieks of murdered children, rising above the singing of the chorus, keep them stretched to breaking. But the action unrolls at full speed; Jason has already come up before the tight-closed doors. He tears his fingers in his efforts to open them—he must avenge his young bride, and save his sons from the reprisals of the populace: the chorus calls out that his children are dead already. How many tragedies end on the words 'too late', as destiny overtakes the best speed of men!

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[1] *Ibid.*

But here, destiny is Medea. She appears in the sky, on a winged chariot, in triumph. Beside her, the bodies of the children she and Jason both loved, killed now by the hatred between them. Medea has by this attained her ultimate greatness—she has bought her victory with a price dearer than life. Jason insults and entreats her in turn. But the words of Jason, for all his skill in juggling with words, fall back to earth, powerless now and meaningless. Medea, in her appalling triumph, has taken on a kind of rigidity; flesh no more, nothing but steel. An impassibility, shaken only by an inhuman laugh, flung in the face of Jason.

And now we can say who she is.

◎

Who is she? A monster, of course. But so close to ourselves, that if she is one, any of us may be. Let us try to understand.

Medea is, in the first place, a heart driven wild with passion. She loved Jason, that is clear—as a lover, and also from pride. He was one of her captures, and she boasts of it. But now she hates him, and in her breast hate seems to have covered all besides. She does not hate in Jason, as some do, one that she still loves: her hate derives both from an abolished love, and from her outraged pride—she hates in Jason the man who has humiliated her, and stands as the negation of her own strength. And it is to re-affirm, in the eyes of others, and more still in her own, this strength which he denied, that she kills her children; for thereby she wounds their father mortally and avenges her humiliation.

She loves her children. She calls them her 'darlings', she loves 'the light in their eyes' at sight of which 'her heart fails'. She loves them as she caresses them tenderly, and no less when she kills them. She kills them so that her enemies shall not laugh at her; because her horrible thirst for domination has become a 'demon' (the word comes several times in the text of the play) which is within her, and which she can no longer control. Is this 'demon' a force which has entered her from outside herself? Or is it a criminal madness, lodged in the unplumbed, irrational depths of her being? Both perhaps. Medea does not know; she only knows that this force is stronger than her will, and she tells us so.

All this is something more than incredibly impressive realistic psychology. The serene will of Medea is shown admitting defeat at the hands of her passion, and this passion lives in her and possesses her, a demoniac element lodged in a tender mother's heart. So it is a psychological state, but also *possession.* Psychological forces are not distinguishable from the forces that direct the universe. And we ourselves, are we distinguishable from the universe? This is the question to which we are led by the psychological realism discovered by Euripides. He is stressing, in Medea's demoniac passion, our involvement in the world, our subjection to the cosmos. But to be conscious of it is to be already, in some sort, freed from it. Tragic truth is a force that liberates.

Euripides does not pronounce explicitly on the nature of this demoniac force. What he shows with the utmost clarity is the fearful complexity of our own hearts. And also, that this force which lives in us is *tragic*, in that we can do nothing against it, and it destroys us.

Medea is destroyed entirely, in the very hour of her triumph. The obstacles that always, up to this, restored her strength, these obstacles now exist for her no more; she has even gone beyond maternal love. Now, in her victory, she will dash herself against the void.

And her death—in the figurative sense—is not felt by us as a punishment, but an accomplishing of her mission, a fulfilling of her nature, which, like any other fulfilment, leaves us joyful.

CHAPTER TWO

THE TRAGEDY OF *IPHIGENIA AT AULIS*

That tragedy of the human heart discovered by Euripides, to which I referred in discussing *Medea*, is not the only factor that may lead to the destruction of the hero in this poet. Most commonly the drama is constructed to show that elements of very different natures—the will of a divinity, the chance of unforeseen circumstances, the characters' own feelings, or those of the tragic hero himself—all converge or appear to converge towards that death of the hero so dreaded by the audience: but at the same time, the characters being very changeable, and chance and divine will no less, another trend of the play, setting in the opposite direction, carries us each moment not towards his death, but towards his salvation. Hence a very complex action, with perpetual vicissitudes and many reversals, plunging us down into terror and despair only to toss us back to heights of hope and joy. Never did Aeschylus and Sophocles invent actions so complex, *plots* so full of suspense, making us catch our breath one moment, and draw it deep the next. Here too is displayed, even in the decline of tragedy, the brilliant originality of Euripides' art.

I want to try to demonstrate part of what I have said by reference to certain characters of *Iphigenia at Aulis*, but without relating its action.

Iphigenia's death, which we expect from the opening of the play, has been demanded by an oracle of Artemis in exchange for favourable winds for the Greek fleet bound towards Troy; and I shall show that this destiny which is the very heart, the cruel kernel of the tragedy, is in great part the product of the unstable characters of the figures surrounding the heroine. These persons, who now wish her death and now wish to avert it, are as it were the working parts of the tragic event which dominates the whole drama and finally draws everything together into itself—then, by a final stroke of chance, is called off at the exact moment when it should occur—I mean the death of Iphigenia.

◎

Agamemnon—the father and king, he who is ordered by the oracle to slaughter his child in order to assure victory over Troy for his people—Agamemnon is one of those characters who are split internally, one of those complex, or I will even say confused, natures, that the art of Euripides takes pleasure in portraying.

Agamemnon is a weak man, a soul made up of impulses, without a will. He is not evil, he is not heartless; far from it. Sensitive, over-sensitive, he is full of good intentions, facile tenderness, indulgent dreams for his dear ones, grand projects for his country and himself. He loves his daughter; he would like to see her happy, well married, rich in love as she is in beauty. He loves Greece, and he would like to see her independent and proud. He loves honours and glory; he would like to leave behind him a great name for posterity. But it is always 'he would like'. His will can only be defined in the conditional—it does not enter the world of the real, has never learnt to shape events. On the contrary, his unsubstantial being lets itself be shaped by men and circumstances. The will of others at once makes him doubtful of his own. He drifts, propelled by his own sentiments. Let but one of his plans, one of his attachments, conflict with another, one of the beings half-formed within him—the kind father, the great man, the impenitent dreamer—threaten to obstruct another, and he is at a loss, unable to choose his course and hold to it. He writes for Iphigenia to come to the Greek camp, tears up the letter, writes it again. He says no to Menelaus when Menelaus demands the abominable murder; then, when Menelaus, softened by his brother's tears, says no in his turn, it is he, Agamemnon, who says yes to what he finds it convenient to call fate. For any obstacle to his shifting will is seen by his unsteady eyes as destiny. At length, after leaving others to decide in his place, he clutches madly, as weak men do, at the decision he imagines is dictated by duty. Deaf to all further argument, he stifles the voice of his own heart and even of common sense, and roughly thrusts from him the daughter he loves. He imagines that in this way, by the ignoble obstinacy which serves him instead of courage, he is giving his people—as he thinks he is giving himself—a call to, and a lesson in, determination.

In his uncompromising love of truth, Euripides has always taken extreme pleasure in deflating false values. Here is Agamemnon, generalissimo and king of kings: he cannot force the army, the politicians, and the priests whom he detests to accept the deepest desire of his heart (the saving of his beloved daughter), even though he knows that it is the voice of conscience and natural reason, whatever a goddess may have demanded; instead he tamely submits to everyone in turn, and finds himself, from one surrender to another, driven back on the only courage he has left, the courage of fear. This lamentable Agamemnon, whom nevertheless we cannot prevent ourselves liking, is one of the cruellest creations of our poet, the reader of hearts.

There is no other course for this weak and sensitive man except to be, just for a moment, brutal and inexorable in carrying out the destiny he has shaped for himself. He who could not hold his own against circumstances, or his own subordinates, or the absurd and arbitrary oracle, at last finds enough courage in his own panic to harden his heart against two pleading women, to face the heart-rending appeal of Iphigenia, and the outstretched hands of the baby Orestes! An unpleasant minute which he gets through somehow, then he breaks away, with lying words about inevitable war; words befitting a hero in torment—he who is no more than a criminal.

Once again, as often before in his plays, Euripides places the tragedy of the human condition in that region of our beings where our instincts (good or evil, it matters little), and our sentiments, even the most legitimate of them (family affection, love of country, desire of glory), reject the guidance and control of calm thought, firm will and accepted principles, and so drive us hither and thither at random, and assuredly at length to disaster. Without philosophizing or moralizing, Euripides enjoys the keen pleasure of setting down the truth. He notes that Agamemnon loves his daughter and his daughter loves him, that a wonderful affection unites them, but that the happiness of Iphigenia to which she seems to be destined by this interchange of affection, has nothing to build on, if it would escape the clutches of the gods, except the shifting sands of her father's heart. It is this, far more than the trap set by the oracle, it is this infirm paternal love that will cause Iphigenia's death. Is there any shape of destiny more tragic?

So with the other characters. Clytemnestra loves her daughter. Who would dare deny it? She shows, she flaunts, profuse riches of maternal love to try to save her. And yet a hidden wound saps this overflowing affection and robs it of all effectiveness.

This demonstrative mother is a dominating woman. In this family where the men are all sensibility and all nerves, she is all will-power. We expect her energy to carry the day easily over the spineless husband at whom she gibes without mercy. She is proud of herself, and has the right to be. She has run her life well: the accomplished wife of a man she married unwillingly, she has borne children as she should, given them the upbringing they should have, lacked none of the virtues she should possess—the faithful wife, the good mother, the perfect housewife. A model of the bourgeois virtues.

Her entrance is imposing. She arrives on a chariot, with her eldest daughter whom she was asked to bring, and her youngest child whom she took with her on her own responsibility; also with much luggage. They and it come down from the chariot in good order, attended to by the servants and the inquisitive chorus, and deluged with good advice. After which she orders her daughter to take her stand beside her, and calls on the company to admire.

From her husband she requires details of the family and ancestry of the young man, and the arrangements for the marriage ceremony. It is a good match, she expresses her satisfaction while still regretting that the wedding, in view of the circumstances, cannot be as splendid as it should be. When Agamemnon asks her to stay away from the ceremony, she refuses to be treated in such a way and protests with vehemence. What, give away her daughter in her absence, a fine thing! Let the father hold the nuptial torch and not the mother, how unsuitable! In this quarrel, she has the last word.

She is a redoubtable matron, strong enough, it would seem, to snatch its prey back from fate, and impose her will on her wretched mate. She does not succeed, fiercely as she struggles. Why not? There is a worm in the fruit, a flaw in this mother's heart, which makes her pleadings for her child sound false. This daughter she says she loves, she defends, in reality, only from *amour-propre*. She is being robbed of something that is hers, and she is even more outraged than desperate. How dare they do such a thing to her? She parades her virtues and her grievances, passes from supplication to invective, then threat. In this fight against the eternal adversary, the husband, she seems at times to forget what is at stake, the life of her child. Never does she forget herself, or her just claims. In truth, she does not implore, she argues. But the force of her arguments does not prevent the audience from asking this strange question: 'Between the father who is about to slaughter her, and the mother who seeks to save her, which loves the child more?' The reply is not in doubt. In reality, both love her; but, while the weak father is bound to his daughter by every fibre of his miserable heart, the strong mother loves in her above all a 'possession' which it is wicked to take from her, a portion of the capital of happiness she has built up in the course of a well-planned life. . . . Is love the right word?

So that is why Clytemnestra's maternal outpourings remain ineffectual. She cannot sway her husband because she herself is not touched to the depths. The sorrow of this mother is impure, adulterated by the vulgar satisfaction she derives from contemplating herself.

After this scene the tragic demon uses this falsely maternal mother to plunge Iphigenia into the depths of desolation. The cruellest scenes of the drama are those where the poor child, deserted by her father, has no other assistance in her last struggle but the embarrassing sympathy of her mother. In her relationship with Clytemnestra, far more than with Agamemnon, we feel that Iphigenia is condemned to the bitterest solitude. She walks to her death utterly alone. The tragic poet—or the demon of tragedy—has set her beside the obtuse character of Clytemnestra, not to console her in death, but to represent with irony the incomprehension of the living for those the dark angel leads away.

Clytemnestra, like Agamemnon, is one of the figures expressing the destiny of Iphigenia.

There is no need to spend long on the two other emissaries of destiny. The kindly, coarse, skin-deep sensibility of Menelaus, hindered in its effect by the wounded husband's vanity, can only hasten her doom when—at the most unpropitious moment, in floods of tears, but without much insistence—he decides to try to save her. Still more impulsive than his brother Agamemnon, tossed by his emotional nature from one extreme to the other, a fantastic husband who moves heaven and earth to win back a wife he sees as hateful, a brother overflowing now with invective, now with pity—such an unstable nature is a perfect tool for the nameless fate which brings disaster on men all the more surely when their hearts are disordered.

Lastly Achilles, the youth with the limpid, generous, scrupulous nature, who sees his affinity with Iphigenia in a flash—that girl of noble enthusiasm whom a lying trick has given him for wife without his knowledge; what can he do for this kindred spirit? Firmly convinced of his own merits, naïvely assured that a thousand maids covet his marriage-bed, he offers his life, and is willing to see it refused. He passes across the desolate horizon of the maiden, like a sigh for impossible happiness, or a mocking image of love, seen for a moment just as the lonely road that she has chosen opens in front of her, leading to death.

So tragedy has laid its snare in the hearts of all those who love Iphigenia.

◆

But the snare would still not shut but for an unkind fate, an outstanding Misfortune, who is perhaps the true god of tragedy—this Chance that seems, in certain dramas of Euripides, to stand as proxy for the absent gods. We have only to re-read *Iphigenia*, and watch how the action is constructed.

We shall see all the sentiments of the characters, all the circumstances of the drama mesh together and start and propel each other with complete accuracy. Not one miscalculation in the progress of the plot. Every time a character has performed his function, and inclined in a given direction both the action and the emotion (hope or fear) which it registers in us, then without fail another character appears, moved by a sentiment which is always natural and entirely logical, to incline the action and our emotion the opposite way. The play forms a jagged line, each sharp angle marking a reversal of fortune, along which the action advances without respite towards the death of Iphigenia on which all converges. Whatever the characters do or fail to do, whether they are scheming for this death or trying to avert it, it overhauls them all the time, at an ever-increasing pace, through the perfectly combined operation of the passions in play. But which of them thinks of it all the time, except for Chance, Chance that thinks of nothing?

Here *Oedipus Rex* will make a convenient term of comparison. Sophocles' drama is no less fine a mechanism than *Iphigenia at Aulis*: but the infernal machine that crushes Oedipus does not work by itself. Sophocles forces us to recognize and confess its divine author. At least he makes us accept, behind events, the presence of an active mystery, a terrible god, whence our destiny proceeds. In the mechanism that destroys Iphigenia, more complex and so finely set, is there no other hand this time than that of a skilful author (and I mean, a man of letters)?

Yes. There is that Absence that makes sport of us, and bears no more terrible a name than that of Chance.

This must be emphasized. Of the five characters on whom the life or death of Iphigenia depends—Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Menelaus, Achilles, and Iphigenia herself of course—there is not one who does not work to save her at some point of the drama, one after another, or two or three together. But as misfortune would have it (what Misfortune?), they never work together at the same time. To exorcize Tragedy, and deprive it of all power over this threatened life, only that one thing is needed after all—a coincidence of good will, a decision taken in common. And 'the Trojan war would not take place'.[1] Without need of a miracle, Iphigenia would live.

Is the poet trying to tell us that the gods insisted on throwing Greeks and Trojans into those ten years of slaughter? Not even that. The oracle tells the Greeks, 'If you wish to sail, pay the price.' This drama does not show the war as a fated thing coming from the gods; nor even as an obvious necessity of political and national life. Indeed it should be noted that Greece seems menaced in her existence and liberty only by a figure of speech, on the lips of chiefs whose interest it is to say so. If it is true that the aim of all this is to enable one of the leaders 'not to be stripped of his command and lose his fair fame', and the other to 'hold in his arms a beautiful woman, in despite of reason and honour', does that entitle the war to be called necessary and legitimate? Can we call it a war of liberation? We doubt it, when on the lips of the ingenuous Iphigenia we notice that 'to save Greece' and 'to rule over the Barbarians' are interchangeable expressions. Has Euripides, the hater of war, given an ironical cast to this simple child's gift of her life in a cause he knows to be illusory? Is he showing her as a victim of the fallacies of patriotic sentiment? I shall not attempt to decide this question, the most delicate of all.

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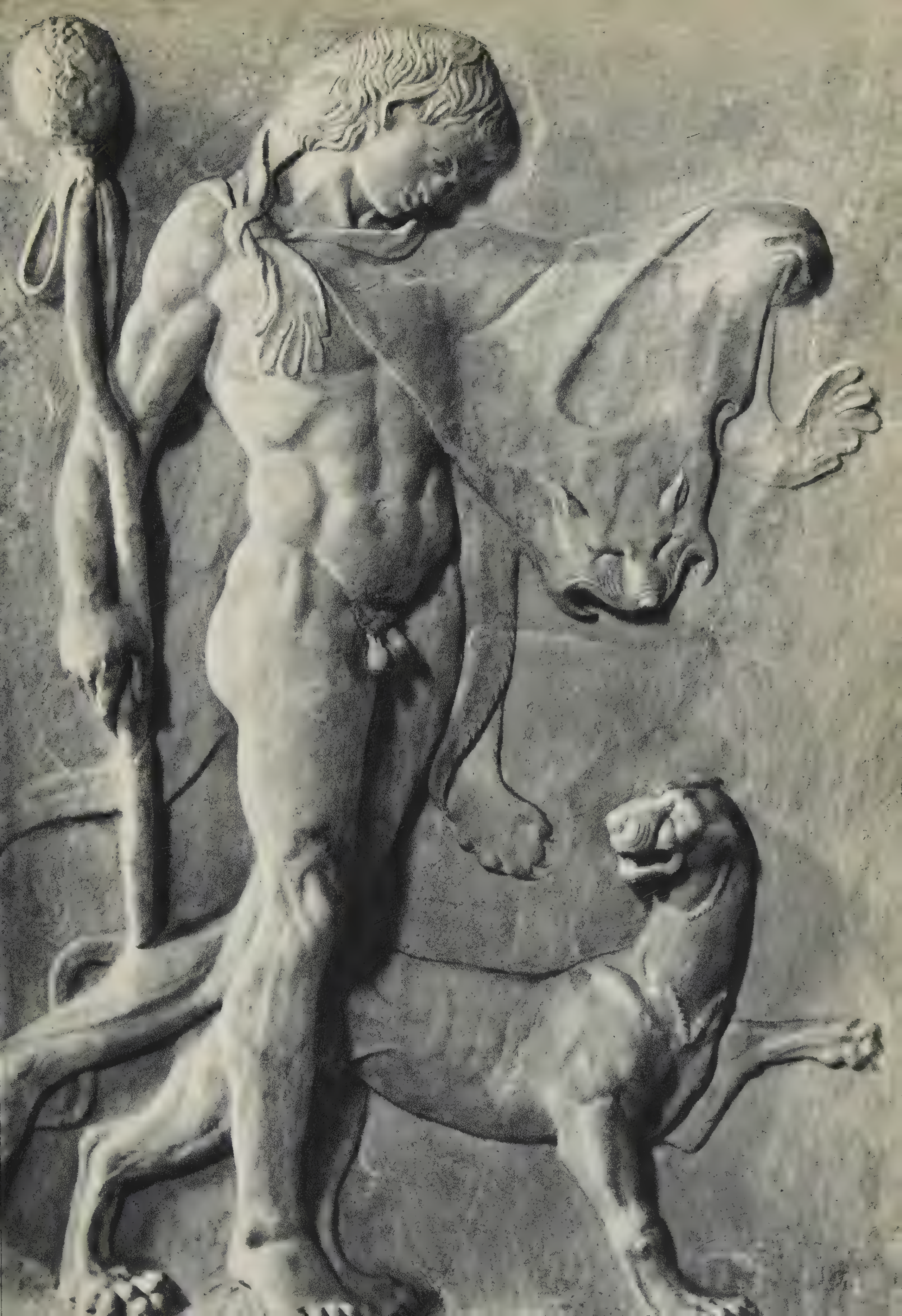
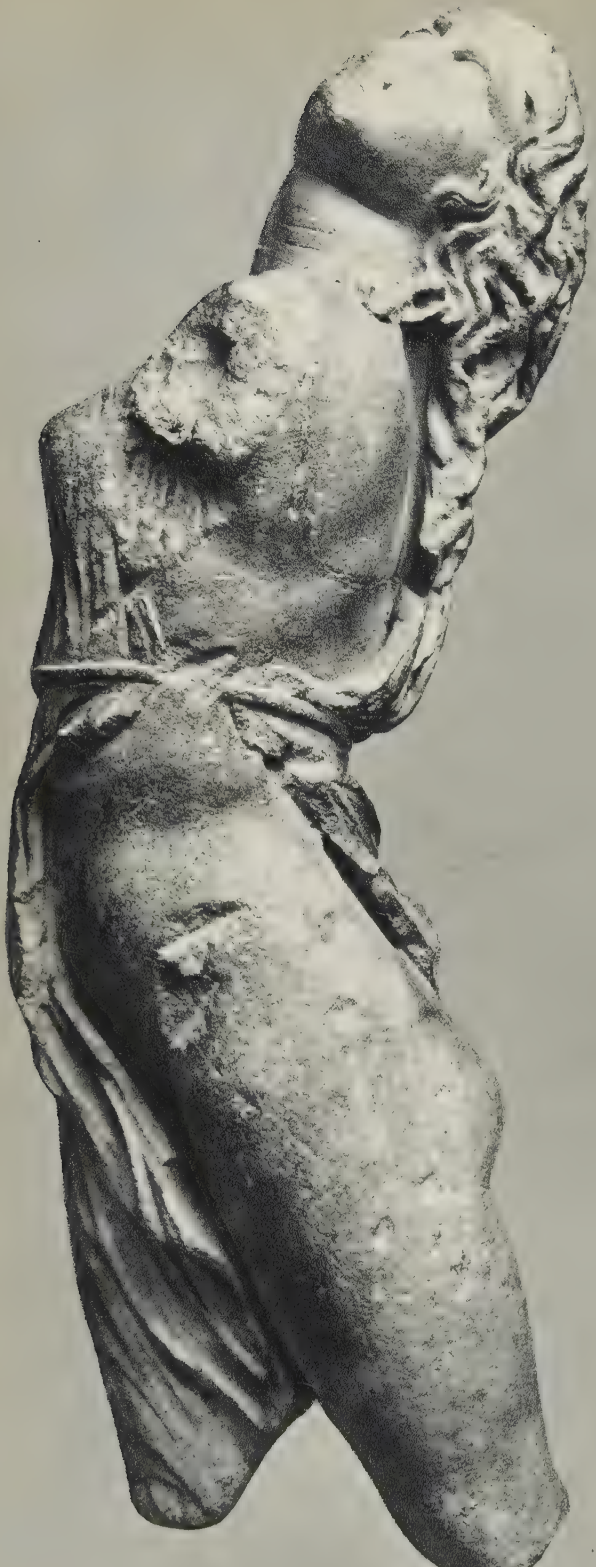
[1] Allusion to *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*, the play by J. Giraudoux which has been translated as *Lion at the Gates*.

3. *Fragment of a Bacchic procession. Naples, National Museum*
4. (Overleaf, left) *Maenad, after Scopas* (*4th Century B.C.*)
5. (Overleaf, right) *Funerary stele of Dexileos in the Ceramicus, Athens* (394 *B.C.*). *Rome, German Institute of Archaeology*





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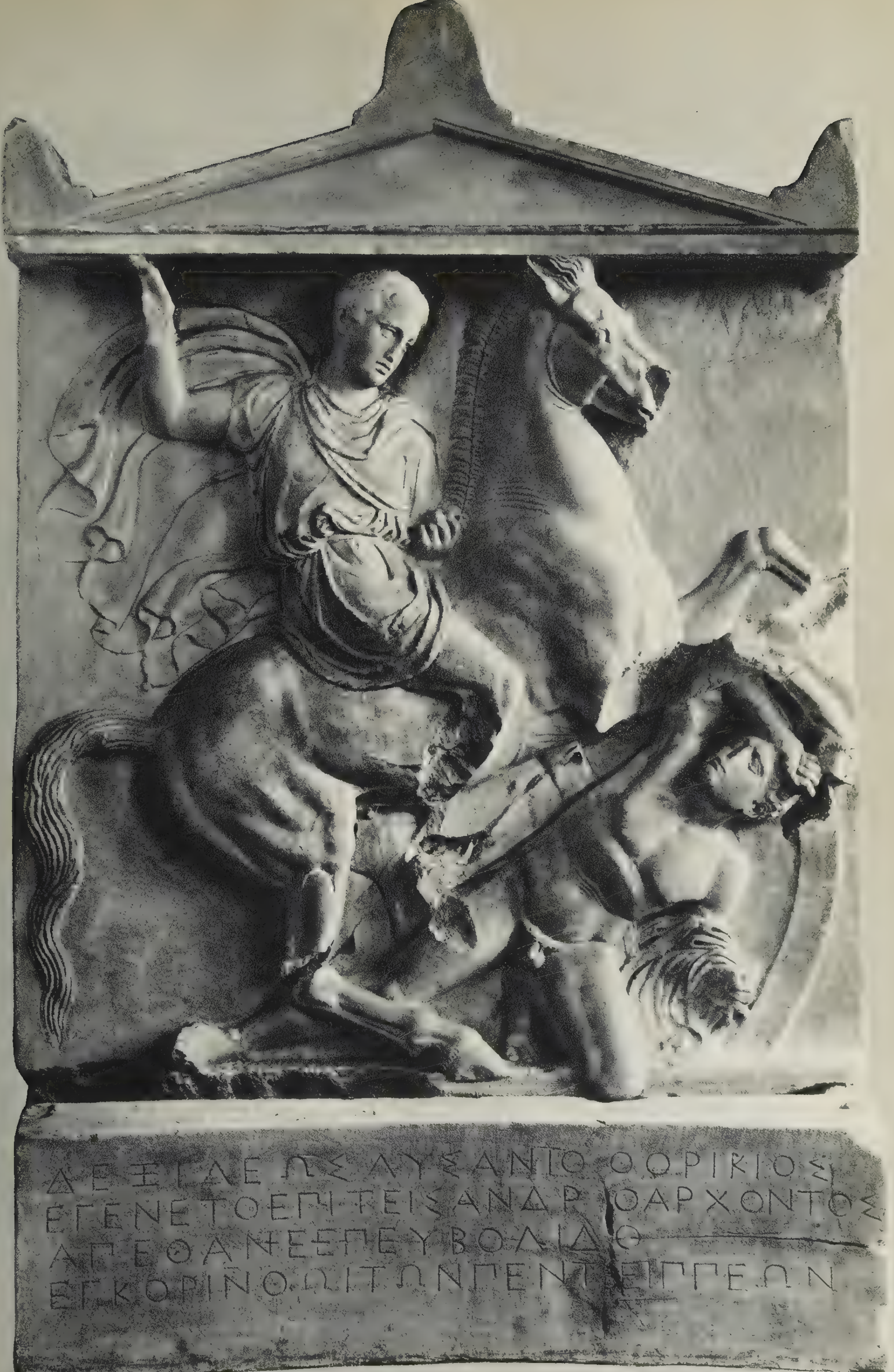
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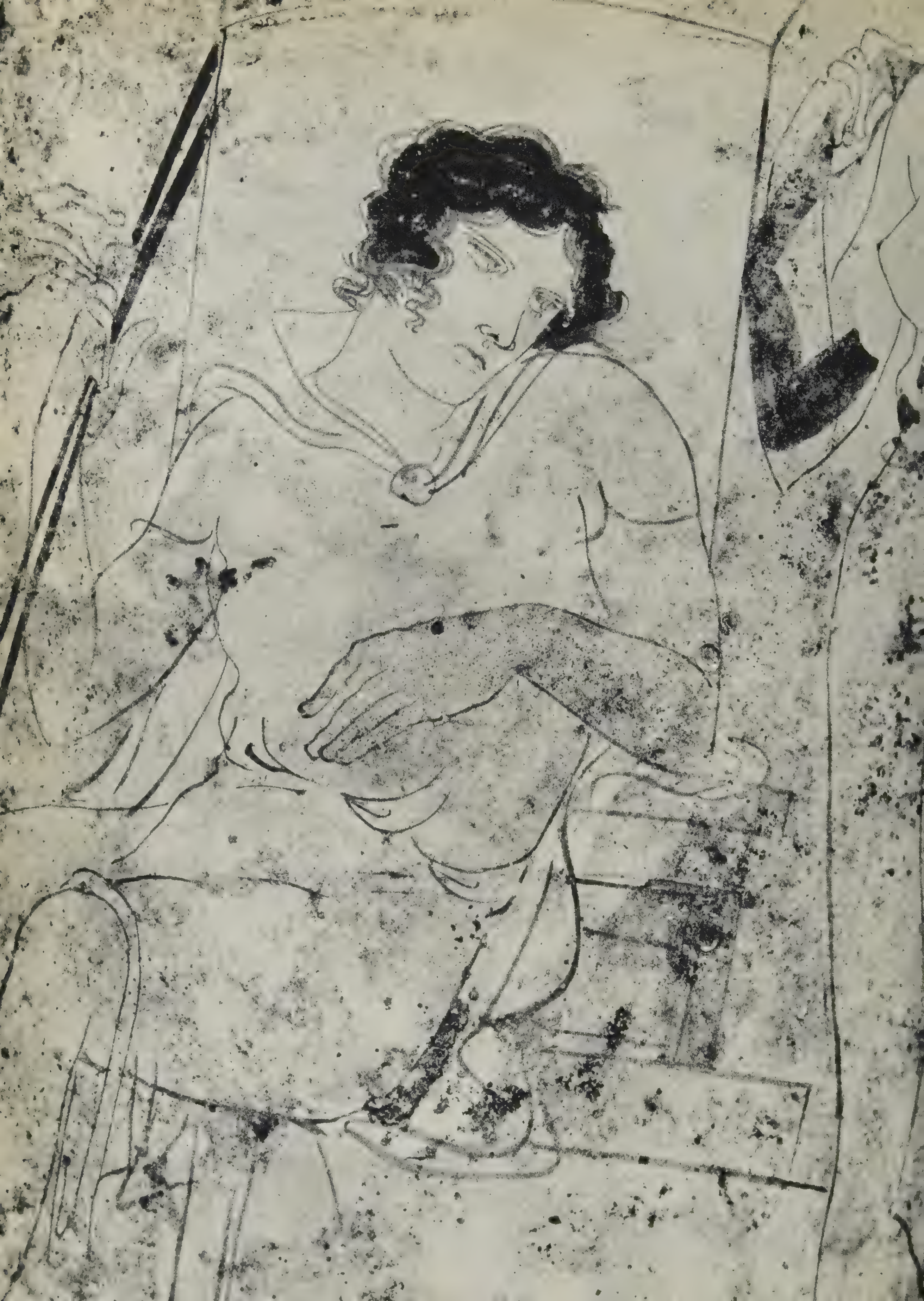

One thing is certain: this war, more absurd than most, and detestable as they all are, is invariably shown as being avoidable. It could easily be avoided—and the action constructed by the poet is there to show this perfectly clearly, with its to-and-fro of opposite decisions and sudden repentances—if only for one minute all the wills tending to save her could be pooled instead of acting chaotically, as they do; if a single wall of defence could be made of the treasures of affection, generosity and pity that are squandered. But, by some chance that none can regulate, this of all the decisive minutes in the drama is precisely the one that never comes. The demon of perversity rules the action and foils every attempt. When Agamemnon tries to save his daughter, Menelaus stops him; when Menelaus wants to help him, Agamemnon declares that it has become impossible; when Clytemnestra and Iphigenia assail the readily-moved Agamemnon with tears and supplications, this unstable character has become as hard as flint. And at last, when Achilles proposes to use force of arms, it is Iphigenia, who was clutching at life the moment before, that relinquishes her hold and leaps to death. Each time Misfortune is there, not even in the form of an ill-disposed person, but as a diffused miasma, able to infect a man's soul, or to penetrate some cranny in events, change fortune into misfortune, and deal death. A letter written a little too late and misdirected—no more than this is needed to tip the scales.

The ultimate tragedy of *Iphigenia* seems to me, then, to lie in the lack of agreement between the common efforts of men to ensure their happiness. It is the in-and-out of men's wills, the eternal perplexity of the characters, and their collapse at the critical moments, that give the tragic element its specific weight. It is not even necessary for the evil forces at work to be very great—Agamemnon's ambition is not exalted, Menelaus' conjugal desires are not strong. It is only necessary that, in the second when Destiny hangs in the balance, the forces making for good should for some reason be in eclipse, or have passed over to the other camp. It is only necessary that there should be a gap in the circle of wills which, if they kept together, could save everything. Through this flaw in the heart, this odd inadequacy of human beings, Iphigenia's chance flows away.

This tragedy of a disordered world, anarchic sentiments, fluctuating wills, is manifest throughout the works of Euripides—in *Iphigenia*, strikingly. But to the ingredients of tragedy this play adds one, on the plane of human relations, which is nowhere else so forcibly presented—the lack of agreement between men at moments when some sacrifice from each is needed to avert disaster. Anarchy there as well. Each seeks his own advantage, and hands are disunited. Iphigenia rejects the last hand offered her.

Disaster lies in wait for every successful venture of men. This hostility of the world to our happiness is called by the chorus of *Iphigenia*, taking up an old

6. *White lecythus of the late 5th Century B.C. Athens, National Museum*

expression of the language of religion, 'the wrath of the gods'. But to judge by the action of the play, this jealous wrath seems to mean no more to Euripides, though he brings in the word 'gods', than the obscure menace hanging over any life of happiness, particularly over those that are fullest of promise.

In this same passage, the poet's thought goes out to a state of society now lost, but not lost irremediably, a state in which men renounced anarchy, united their endeavours in 'a common struggle', and evaded the savage stroke threatening them. In the world as it is, as the myth of Iphigenia makes the poet see it, men are incapable of forming that 'common front' to save one of themselves. It is their failure that brings down on Iphigenia—a turncoat herself—'the hatred of the gods'.

But how could men put up a common struggle against the evil forces of demoniac fury? This fury is not only the name they have given to the evil aspect of the universe, it is the name one has to give to the folly of their own hearts, their fundamental inability to possess themselves in happiness.

All is evanescent around man, all within him is in flux. In the uncertainty in which he struggles blindly, he would like to feel he can rely on the help of his brothers in misfortune, on the machine he calls society. Several expressions in the passage on the 'common fight' make reference to it. Could not this machine protect him from some of the covert strokes of destiny? That was why he invented 'society'.

But something seems to have gone wrong with this great invention, since it is for the 'common good' that Iphigenia must die.

Careless gods, misguided hearts, treacherous chance—all these enter into the doom of Iphigenia. But even so poetry brings its light into the tragic dark, and creates joy as well as tears.

◎

This drama, *Iphigenia*, of which I have noted so far some of the tragic elements, is not only tragedy, it is also poetry.

What I mean is this. The tragic forces bearing down on Iphigenia loom large in the play, and in our minds; but in our minds at the same time, through the songs of the chorus, through the despair of Iphigenia, another voice seeks to make itself heard. The poet has awaked in us the primal energies of the universe, the *cosmos*—that wonderful Greek word which denotes at once world, order and beauty. The further we progress in this inhuman, this tragic drama, the more we feel that beyond the tragedy something else is trying to speak to us; it is the confused voice of the cosmos, of the world we are part of, the voice of poetry—images, sounds, rhythms—the music of living beings, the alternations of shade and light, the pulsing of our arteries, all calling out to us. The poetic word takes shape, and as it mingles with the tragic horror enables us to bear it, even to love it; procuring us what, because of its ambiguity, has been called 'delicious pain' (the true definition of the pleasure of poetry, or at least of tragic poetry).

The world has demanded the right to speak. At once we are transported into a new climate—not carried away in the direction of some paltry idealism, but in the midst of a reality that has become more authentic and easier to breathe. In the midst of reality the poet's images—images containing all the elements of the poetic charm which we have mentioned (music of words, dance of rhythms)—soothe and gladden us in the same moment that the horror of tragedy stares us in the eyes.

From this we see the unparalleled need in Greek tragedy for the choral portions, the poetry and the music of the choruses; the need also for those strains sung by the hero or heroine in the hour of death.

Not that we forget those cruel imperatives which in their stark brutality make tragedy one of the indispensable means of our initiation into manhood. Through it, through the pain it shows and inflicts, we learn how to be men, and how difficult is this calling, beset as it is by so many obstacles coming from the gods and from ourselves—from this weak human heart of ours. Closed too, after ceaseless vicissitudes, ineluctably and for each one of us, by the incomprehensibility of death. But the tragedy of *Iphigenia* brings, or seems to promise, other things besides. It delights us perpetually with other things. In the interstices between the bitter scenes of recrimination, and the horrifying strokes of destiny, it brings us, in the songs of girls, stretches of incomparable poetry.

The themes of our tragic destiny are themselves taken up by the poet in his choruses, or, in the sung scenes, by the characters of the play. Always it is the cruelty of love, the wild absurdity of war, the odious sacrifice of Iphigenia—the same dreadful themes once again, but repeated in another key, the key of poetry. Love and death come before us surrounded by a sort of poetic aura, given them by the images of the objects surrounding them, with which they are closely associated by the poet. These images come from the natural world, from the beauty of the world of the senses; and of that beauty of the world, love and death now appear to partake; they are impregnated and decked with the beauty of meadows and trees, beasts of the field, birds, goddesses, rivers, the heavens, gold, and ivory. . . . They are mingled with shepherds' calls, piped ditties, women's feet in patterned dance on silver sands. . . . And Eros' shaft is called a twin shaft, 'a double shaft of graces' —*δίδυμα τόξα χαρίτων*—because the very lives it destroys it fills with joy. And Helen, if she is the worst of wives, is also the sister of the divine Dioscuri. And when the Phrygians stand on their ramparts and await the onset of death, it comes in the form of a monstrous and splendid god, Ares, rising out of the sea, bronze-clad. And when Pergamum is laid low, one image remains with us—over its slaughtered sons there are maidens to mourn.

And so it always is. The beauty of the cosmos, the universe, is interwoven always into the horror of our condition.

Rather than go on commenting on this accession of tragedy to the poetry of the cosmos, I will give two examples. Here is the chorus following the strident wrangling of Agamemnon and Menelaus.

Thou camest, Paris, back to where,
Mid Ida's heifers snowy fair,
A neatherd, thou dist pipe such strain
That old Olympus' spirit there
Awoke again.

Full-uddered kine in dreamy peace
Browsed, when the summons came to thee
To judge that Goddess-rivalry
Whose issue sped thee unto Greece,
Before the ivory palaces
To stand, to see in Helen's eyne
That burned on thine, the lovelight shine,
To thrill with Eros' ecstasies.
For which cause strife is leading all
Hellas, with ships, with spears, to fall
Upon Troy's tower-coronal.[1]

Later, at the darkest point in the action, when Agamemnon has repulsed the pleas of Iphigenia, here is the lament she raises.

Alas for me, mother
One song for us twain
Fate finds us—none other
But this sad strain:
Upon me shall the light and the beams of the sun shine never again.

O Phrygian glade
Overgloomed by the crest
Of Ida, where laid
In a snow-heapen nest
Was the suckling by Priam cast forth, which he tore from the mother's breast,

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[1] *Euripides*, translated by Arthur S. Way, Loeb Classical Library, 1912, Vol. I, p. 55.

Yea, left him to lie
Till the death-doom should claim
Paris, whereby
Throughout Troy was his name
Paris of Ida, where fostered a herdman mid kine he became.

Would God amid fountains
Of foam-silvered sheen
Of the nymphs of the mountains
His home had not been,
Nor where roses and bluebells for Goddesses bloomed amid watermeads green!

Came the Queen of Beguiling
With love-litten eye
Passion-kindling, and smiling
As for victory nigh;
Came Pallas in pride of her prowess, and Hera the Queen of the Sky:

And Hermes was there
The Herald of Heaven.
So the Strife of Most Fair,
Loathed contest, was striven,
Whereof to me death, but to Danaans glory, O damsels, was given.

Me the Huntress receiveth
For her firstfruits of prey,
And mine own sire leaveth
His child—doth betray
A daughter most wretched, O mother, my mother, and fleeth away.

Woe's me to have seen her—
Helen, whose name
Is a bitterness keener
Than words may frame!
She is made to me slaughter and doom, and a father's deed of shame.

Oh had Aulis received not
Bronze prows long embayed!
O had Troy been reprieved not
While their pine-wings delayed!
O had Zeus never breathed on Euripus the breath that our voyaging stayed!—

He who tempers his gales
Unto men as he will;
Some shake out glad sails,
Some in sorrow sit still
Fate-fettered: these speed from the haven, the white wings of those never fill.

O travail-worn seed
Of the sons of a day!
How Fate hath decreed
Disaster alway! . . .[1]

And so throughout the drama is heard, in the lyric strains that accompany it, that voice of the universe which we call poetry, a spell that binds us with sweetness, a song that makes us love the cruelty of tragedy. Greek tragedy steeps us at once in terror and rapture, and makes our hearts dance within us.

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 117–21.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DRAMA OF THE *BACCHAE*

Euripides died in 406 in Macedonia, while a guest at the court of King Archelaus. He was seventy-five years old. *Iphigenia at Aulis* and the *Bacchae* are the last tragedies written by him which have come down to us; they were performed in Athens in 405, after the poet's death, and both gained first prizes, a victory rarely won by Euripides in his lifetime.

The drama of the *Bacchae* is a strange, a baffling one. At least, it poses with great firmness the terms of a mystery which troubled our poet all his life, and to which he has given the most contradictory answers—the mystery of God, his existence, his justice or injustice, his action in the life of the universe and the life of man.

The mystery of God, and the need for God, tormented Euripides throughout his career. He believes and blasphemes alternately. In the *Bacchae*, at last, by creating the contrasted characters of the play, he gives release to the forces that divided him, the forces that made him a *tragic* poet. The *Bacchae* is the key to Euripides the tragic poet; and it has been given the most diametrically opposite interpretations—for one it bears witness to his conversion, for another it is his clearest rejection of God. I shall return to that topic; but, to enable us to understand it, I shall begin by giving a summary of this splendid poem.

We are in Thebes, the birthplace of a god. He is before us, Dionysus, the son of Zeus; he has returned to the city where his father's thunderbolt delivered him from the womb of his mother Semele, and in his birthplace he will manifest his godhead to the Thebans who have shown him disrespect.

With him come the Maenads, Asiatic women raving in ecstasy; it is they who have helped him to make his worship prevail in the far-off East. Now he is about to make it prevail in the city of his birth, in Thebes.

Already he has struck his mother's sisters. They had mocked at his divine origin: now they confess it, on the mountainside where they have become Maenads themselves and proclaim him god.

But a more redoubtable adversary still faces him—Pentheus, the young king of the country, who can see in the Dionysiac cult nothing but deceit and anarchy. Dionysus must show him that he is a god. To do this, he has taken on the appearance, at once reassuring and disturbing, of one of his own priests, a young Lydian, gentle-voiced, delicate-featured. Under this mask he will try to win over King Pentheus; but if Pentheus evades his blandishments, Dionysus will strike. In these terms the tragic conflict is posed.

The mystical temperature of the tragedy rises after the entrance of the chorus of the Asiatic Maenads. As they advance to the sound of flute and tambourine, they tell of the bliss of the believer who yields himself to his god in the bosom of nature. The road to Dionysus shuns the artificiality of towns, it leads out among the mountains, to the mysteries of trees and wild creatures. Clothed in the fawn-skin, drunken with music, man comes to dance in the round of nature; he dances and the earth dances with him; he attains to ecstasy and falls to the ground in the vision of the god summoning him away. Here is a fragment from this choric song:

O happy to whom is the blessedness given
To be taught in the Mysteries sent from heaven,
Who is pure in his life, through whose soul the unsleeping
Revel goes sweeping!

. . . . . .

One dancing-band shall be all the land
When, led by the Clamour-king
His revel-rout fills the hills . . .

. . . . . .

O trance of rapture, when, reeling aside
From the Bacchanal rout o'er the mountains flying
One sinks to the earth, and the fawn's flecked hide
Covers him lying
With its sacred vesture, wherein he hath chased
The goat to the death for its blood—for the taste
Of the feast raw-reeking, when over the hills
Of Phrygia, of Lydia, the wild feet haste,
And the Clamour-king leads, and his 'Evoë!' thrills
Our hearts replying!

Flowing with milk is the ground, and with wine is it flowing, and flowing
Nectar of bees; and a smoke as of incense of Araby soars;
And the Bacchant, uplifting the flame of the brand of the pine ruddy-glowing,
Waveth it wide, and with shouts, from the point of the wand as it pours,

Challengeth revellers straying, on-racing, on-dancing, and throwing
Loose to the breezes his curls, while clear through the chorus that roars
Cleaveth his shout.[1]

The Maenads are not alone in hearing the voice of Bacchus. Here come two old men, the seer Tiresias and Cadmus, the founder of Thebes. Since the breath of the god began to blow over the city, the hearts of these two have beaten more rapidly, and taking the staff of the initiate, they are going up to the mountains to confess the god. Their aged limbs will accomplish this miracle, of dancing in honour of the god. . . . The scene is touching by reason of the simplicity of the two old men's faith; it proclaims, too, the power of one able to cause age to be age no more. But we are not won over yet—barely attracted; uneasy. Our world of sober reasonableness begins to waver.

Enter, suddenly, King Pentheus. He is the tragic hero of the play. We know him to be menaced and he attracts us. We like him too for his directness of speech, his frankness and courage. He is the king, responsible for order in the city. We approve him for resisting the contagion which the equivocal Lydian is spreading. We know indeed that he is wrong in condemning the ecstasies of the new cult as gross debauchery in mystical trappings: but he is sincere in thinking so. Yet is good faith enough to disarm the gods?

The sight of the two old men, whom he thinks to be out of their minds, throws the king into violent anger. His passion, and his unfounded accusations against a cult he does not know, denote a precipitancy of judgment which is unreasonable in the mouthpiece of a reasonable religion. When Pentheus, after throwing such Theban Maenads as could be captured into prison, orders his soldiers to arrest the false prophet, this handsome Lydian who is the god himself, we know that he has sealed his own doom; his fate has been set in motion. Should we admire him, or pity him?

Meanwhile the chorus sings once again the bliss of him who gives himself to the new god. Dionysus is the bringer of joy—with him there are no more cares, but mirth and pleasure, the Muses and the Loves. Woe to him who thinks himself wise without him! Human wisdom is pride and foolishness, man finds peace only in the most childlike faith. Woe to the wise and prudent! This radiant chorus, so pagan in its exaltation of Desire, contains words most strangely redolent of the Gospels. We are not far from 'God hath hid these things from the wise and prudent', or even 'Blessed are the poor in spirit'. Euripides is astonishing—his intuitions of mystery take him out of his own century.

Guards lead Dionysus away in chains. We have come to the heart of the drama;

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[1] *Euripides*, translated by Arthur S. Way, Loeb Classical Library, 1912, Vol. III, pp. 11, 15–17.

from now on the king and the god are to face one another in a series of decisive scenes, separated by the irruption of several miracles into the play's action. Each time the confrontation becomes more tragic, though the tone never ceases to be that of the most natural conversation. This dialogue, repeatedly broken and repeatedly renewed, is a movement of meshed wheels slowly clicking into place. The clockwork regularity is only interrupted at times by sweet songs and strange wonders—deceptive flourishes with which the poet emphasizes the god's patient moves to cut off his prey.

Pentheus is left cold by the first miracle, when the Maenads' chains fall at their feet in the prison, and the bolts draw back of themselves and let the prisoners escape. He takes more notice of the stranger when he is brought to him, with his amazing beauty, and the captivating sweetness in his face. The king questions, and the young man's answers have the same sweetness as his features. The king becomes angry and threatens, and the Lydian replies with a calm more threatening than anger. Pentheus is for a moment perturbed; a soul more permeable to the divine than his would sense a god in such unmoved dignity. It is the ever-repeated scene of the prophet before the prince; we cannot wonder that a *Passion of Christ* of the Byzantine era used some of these lines of Euripides—they recall Jesus before Pilate.

Pentheus. *Thy body in my dungeon will I ward.*
Dionysus. *The God's self shall release me, when I will. . . .*
Pentheus. [*Where is he?*]—*not unto mine eyes manifest.*
Dionysus. *Beside me. Thou, the impious, seest him not.*
Pentheus. *Seize him! This fellow mocketh me and Thebes. . . .*
Dionysus. *I go. The fate that Fate forbids can ne'er*
Touch me.[1]

Thus the violence of Pentheus is lost in the serenity of the god. The man loses foothold and sinks in the deep and treacherous waters of divine mystery; it is clear already that he is lost. What is not clear is whether the god deserves to win.

The chorus lifts its voice again, in strains now troubled and fevered; their poetry unfolds in passionate appeals. Faith calls out for the presence of the imprisoned god: 'Come! . . . Come! . . . Arise!' and proclaims his return already: 'He shall come . . . !'

And suddenly the god replies, and the wonder takes place before our eyes. From the depths of his dungeon he calls to his servants, '*Io Bacchai, io Bacchai!*' and the chorus recognizes its master '*Io despota, io despota!*' The earth quakes, the stones of the architrave fall asunder, and Dionysus has broken his bonds. He is moving through the palace, fire breaks out, and the god appears. The Maenads of the chorus fall at their master's feet and worship.

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[1] Trans. cited, pp. 43–5.

As for the king, he has watched the miracle with terror and rage. The Lydian, once more in his presence, answers his angry outburst only by saying, 'Said I not, . . . one will free me?'

Now come fresh wonders. From Cithaeron comes a herdsman with a strange tale of the life the Bacchae lead in the arms of nature. To him this mount, the same where soon the destiny of Pentheus is to end in horror, presented the most enchanting scene—the paradise where man lives in innocence and in comradeship with the beasts. The Maenads play with snakes; they suckle gazelles and wolf-cubs. Nature pours out every gift in profusion—honey drips from the thyrsus, the spring gushes from the rock, wine spouts from the ground: under their fingers earth gives of her milk as from an udder. But the mildness of nature changes to fury against the profaners who come to disturb the peace of Eden. The cowherd tells how, with some fellows, he tried to seize Agave and bring her down to her son Pentheus—and the fellowship of hills and beasts and women struck back. The mountain raged, the paradise rose in fury against the desecrators. There is fearful bloodshed carried out by the Maenads, which bespeaks the all-mastering power of the god—the god who is nature itself, kindly or death-dealing as he pleases, and inviolable.

The story has no effect on Pentheus: the miracle enrages him. He grows ever more obstinate in combating a religion that offends his sense of order. He has his troops—he will march against the mountain, he will bring the supernatural to reason.

God is stronger than man; but at the very moment that Euripides has convinced us of his omnipotence, Dionysus seems suddenly to decide to forego the use of his power, and try to manifest his godhead by the salvation of a man. In a scene where Pentheus' fate is in the balance, Dionysus holds out a hand to his adversary, urges him to give up his plans, and speaks to him graciously. In vain: for at the one moment when the gates of divine grace are open to him the man, Pentheus, takes his offer for a trap—as in another instant we shall see him take the god's trap for an offer made in friendship. It is the old misunderstanding that keeps man from god; and Pentheus goes on his way. . . .

Then suddenly the god changes his tone. For a moment he had felt pity, but the man hardened his heart, and Dionysus is henceforth only trying to trick him. His mildness, which had become kindliness, now turns to deceit.

Dionysus suggests that Pentheus should disguise himself as a Maenad to spy on the god's followers in the mountains. The king is attracted—the enterprise suits his fearless character, and Dionysus has no difficulty in persuading him. He yields the more easily since he has long been drawn towards this religion he is combating. He goes into the palace to attire himself, while Dionysus exults—'Women,' he says to the chorus,

> *the man sets foot within the toils,*
> *The Bacchants—and death's penalty—shall he find.*[1]

The chorus respond with fresh songs, telling once more of the Maenad's joy in self-surrender, the rapture of play among trees and wild creatures in the midst of nature.

The scene that follows this lovely ode is one of the cruellest Euripides ever wrote. The doomed king comes out of the palace, filled with ghastly joy, in a half delirious state and already possessed by Bacchus. He can see two suns and two cities of Thebes; he sees the horns of the Dionysiac bull on his guide's head. He is delighted with his woman's dress and courts admiration—he has lost all self-respect. Dionysus adds the last touch to his grotesque accoutrement, putting back a curl shaken loose in the dance. Under the god's ironical handling, Pentheus is just a soulless plaything, pitiful and ridiculous. The scene ends with a sinister prophecy, which Pentheus greets with laughter. He will be borne home, the god says, 'in a mother's hands'. 'Soft ease for me!'[2] gaily replies Pentheus, who is not to know *what* his mother will bring home. The whole end of the drama is given up to horror. Never has the tender and cruel Euripides gone further in emotional effects. A kind of blood-lust sweeps through the tragedy, death is savoured slowly and almost lovingly in its physical horror and mental anguish.

First comes the account of Pentheus being torn to pieces by the Maenads. There is not the least turgidity in this terrible passage—the objective tone of a report, with exact details, horrible because precise. The chorus of Bacchants greets this story of a son's murder by his mother with transports of adoration.

The next scene advances a step further into horror. Agave enters jubilant, offering to her god what she thinks is the head of a lion cub she has killed on the mountain—but it is the gory head of her son stuck on the end of her thyrsus. She strokes the features tenderly, without recognizing them.

Euripides intends that she shall recognize them. Her old father, Cadmus, returns from Cithaeron with the mangled remains of his grandson. Brought face to face with the murderous delusion and madness of his daughter, he asks her—as a psychiatrist might—exactly the questions which will force her to realize what it is she has done. The curt tone of the almost scientific examination brings out the pathos still further and carries it to its climax.

This climax was exceeded, perhaps, in the scene following; but that scene is lost

[1] Trans. cited, p. 73.
[2] *Idem*, p. 83.

for us—the text we have depends on a single manuscript, which has been torn here. In it Agave was shown taking up her son's limbs one after the other, laying them in order side by side, kissing them and wailing. A few lines of this horrible scene are restored to us in the Passion Play I have referred to where they are put into the mouth of Mary mourning over the dead body of Christ. But what Euripides had made of such a scene we cannot tell.

At last, at the close of the tragedy, Dionysus appears in the sky. He has laid aside the mask he had chosen to bring his enemy low, and comes to claim his victory. What words has the conquering god to speak to us?

We await him in his majesty—it shines forth. We await him in his justice—it is terrible. We wait hoping for his mercy: will he accept Agave's repentance?—He casts her forth; still less does he think of consoling her. Agave confesses her sin, and implores him: she is met by the 'too late' with which divinity rebuffs mortal at the close of the tragic conflict. 'Too late ye know me' says Dionysus; the man still implores. The god has only one more answer to make, which is 'I am a god'.

◎

How are we to interpret the *Bacchae*? The work, so divided against itself, has never ceased to divide its interpreters.

Some take the tragedy to be a violent attack launched by Euripides against religion. They base their belief principally on the interpretation they give in general to the plays of Euripides, which they present as the *œuvre de combat* of an apostle of enlightenment—a rationalist (their own expression). On the other hand there are critics who see it as an apology of faith, and, setting it in opposition to the rest of Euripides' works, as they understand them, they see it as the testimony of a conversion on the part of the aged poet.

Perhaps these two opinions, seemingly so contradictory, are false only if one is adopted to the exclusion of the other. I mean this: any tragedy is, in one sense, an act of revolt against the world as it is or seems to be; and, in another sense, any tragedy is an act of faith in the world as it should be, or rather as it is, behind the veil of appearances, and revealed by poetry.

It is a conflict of this kind that Euripides has attempted in the *Bacchae*. It is useless to try to identify the poet with one of his characters and neglect the others. Euripides is not the rejector of Dionysus, as distinct from those who confess him, nor *vice versa*. He is, if I may so put it, all the characters at once. He is the conflict of characters; he is the tragedy. The *Bacchae* is the dazzling proof of the blade that tears him asunder, of the wound that he harbours—an unquenched thirst for God.

Euripides, then, is not Pentheus alone; but he is Pentheus as well. Nor is he Pentheus entirely. It is to mistake the nature of poetic creation to identify the poet with any one of his characters, even the tragic hero. A great poet never draws from himself: if he expresses himself in one of his characters, what he gives us in that creation is himself and another at the same time. So it is in the children of our flesh—we may find in a son certain features of the father, but they are new as well as similar. In the same way a character is a new creation, and all we may look to see on its face is a reflection of the author who gave it birth.

The reflection of Euripides in Pentheus is, firstly, that demand for order and reason that the king makes of the god. Pentheus would accept an authentic god, but he is sure that a god who reveals himself through disorder and disturbance of the inner man, a god who is made manifest by absurd miracles, can only be an imposture. Pentheus is not an ungodly man. Euripides has not put into his mouth a single word of scepticism with regard to the divine—nothing to recall the language of the philosophy of the age; Pentheus believes in the gods, but ravings and marvels seem to him to be human folly, not the wisdom and presence of a god. In a word he believes in gods governing the world as sensibly as he thinks, quite honestly, that he governs his city. His down-to-earth mentality, as well as his position as head of the state, make him suspicious of the mystical element in Dionysiac religion. Faced with the enigmatic Lydian, and the Maenads in their trance, Pentheus is a decent embodiment at once of *raison d'État*, of the principle of order, and of simple reason in its narrowest acceptation—common sense, good sense. Pentheus expects the gods to have sense; he expects them to be like himself. One might say that it is a serious thing to expect so little from godhead: but many a god would be found wanting by this yardstick of human decency.

But there is something else in Pentheus—the attraction he feels towards the religion he fights against. It is an attraction he resists, in his own sensible way. What is the meaning of his way of gravitating round the adepts of Bacchus all the time? He plies them with questions, he decides to go and take them unawares on the mountainside. Is it to obtain a more informed opinion of the new cult? Is it not rather because of a feeling that there is a hidden truth in this religion he is persecuting, and a truth that concerns him? Pentheus, inaccessible though he may appear to all religious experience (but is anyone as shut to these things as he seems?) gives the impression at times of being drawn towards the mystery as if by magnetism; he is determined to understand, he is resolved to break into a secret. His rages may be explained in part by the repression, by his reasonable self, of his unacknowledged religious sense. Moreover, he has an unhappy way of giving the questions he puts to the god a positivistic twist, which marks the cast of his thought; and this makes the god reply evasively, or curtly refuse to say anything.

'What use is this religion?' asks the king. The god rejoins, 'That thou mayest not know.' Or again, 'What is thy god like?' Answer: 'What he pleases.'

Such lines put the drama of Pentheus in a strange light. Is it the man shutting himself up against the divine mystery? Or can it be the god who forbids him access? Miracles abound—is it Pentheus that refuses to see them, or is it the god who sees to it that he is not touched? The Lydian asserts the mystic presence of Dionysus: 'Yes, he is here now, marking this dispute.' What else can Pentheus reply but 'Ay, where?—not unto mine eyes manifest'?[1] How can he see, if the god makes himself invisible? More wonders follow—bolts spring from their catches, the god takes the shape of a bull, the royal palace topples in flames. His retina and his ear-drums record these things, but his mind is no nearer opening to the operation of the divinity.

What shall we say then? Why does the god use his power to shut and not to open the eyes of the mind? We are close here to the tragic theme of Grace. The language of Christianity would say that Pentheus has not received Grace. The god, for one moment, seems to offer it to him, in a scene I have mentioned—

Friend, yet this evil may be turned to good. . . .
I would save thee . . .[2]

Offered but not given—what does that mean but that the god withholds, if indeed Grace is a gift? This is assuredly where we come nearest to Euripides in the character of Pentheus. He too wished to understand; his whole tragic work testifies to his desire to give life a religious meaning, to embrace it in its divine reality. Euripides, like Pentheus, often advances to meet the divine with destructive violence. Assuredly his nature is not as alien from mystical feeling, not as arid, as that of Pentheus. And yet, like Pentheus, in his search for God, Euripides may have had that feeling that it was not he who was hardening his heart, but the Other who was refusing.

The poet, as I have said, is not to be found in Pentheus only. The chorus of Maenads, even the two old men, represent, though in lesser degree, the opposite pole of his spiritual life.

Of the two old men, let us say no more than that the steadfastness or the ingenuousness of their faith may well have seemed enviable to the unquiet intellectual Euripides, and tempted him with a promise of security. Tiresias is a doctor of the law who does not permit himself to look into the nature of his beliefs, and purchases peace of mind at that price. Cadmus has the soul of an overgrown child: a formalist, for whom it suffices to perform the rite to attain quietude. The peace of these two old men, their renewal of youth when they accept the truths that are revealed—such may have been a dream that Euripides found himself dreaming in his old age, in a fit of weariness. But the poet picks on these

[1] Trans. cited, p. 43. [2] *Idem*, p. 67.

two figures only for a second: homes for the aged are not for him. If perhaps he envies Cadmus and Tiresias for being what they are, he realizes that he is different: their submissiveness does not satisfy his idea of human dignity. He has always fled from static paradises; and he is off with the Maenads.

The choric poetry of the *Bacchae* is unique in the work of Euripides. This Maenad chorus seems to be pure lyricism, but it is a character in the play as well. This is no poetry soaring above the action in regions of serene beauty: the Maenad chorus sets us in the burning centre of the tragedy, and in the centre of Euripides too. The chorus voices the strongest of the solicitations that reach the poet from the world of the divine.

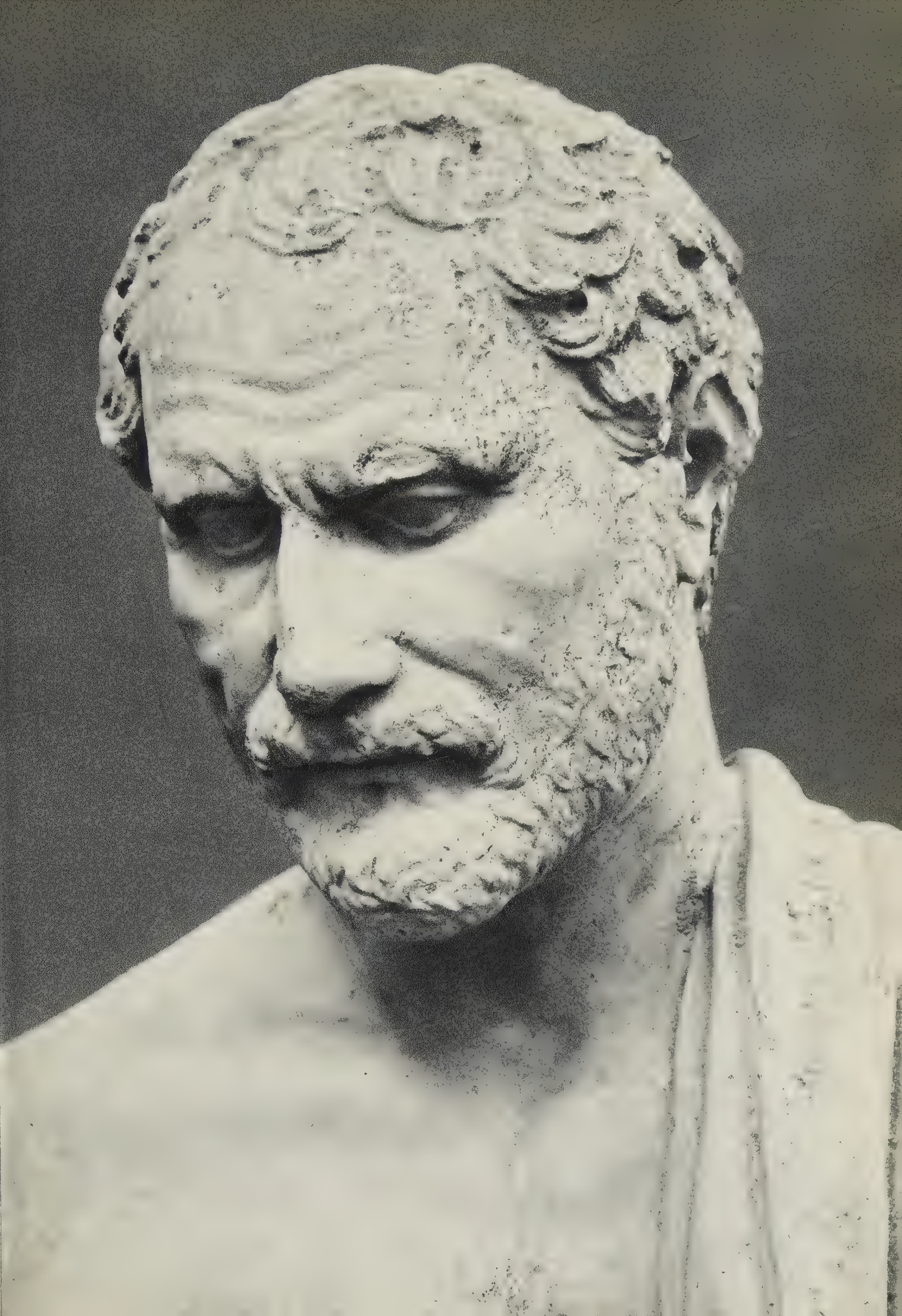
God is revealed in this voice with incomparable force. Not, it is true, as god of the conscience, but as god of nature, of the life of the world. God is on the mountainside, showing forth his free and creative activity by miracles; he is in the gushing of the spring, the bounding of the beasts, the hidden life of wood and hill. He is that fulness of life that enfolds and exceeds the life of men, that stream of universal life that bears man along with its course. All life is divine that moves in the bosom of nature—the fawn sporting in the green bliss of the fields, the shadow-laden branches in the lonely forest; and with these the Bacchant is at one in joy as the storm of possession tosses her. That is god—the communion of all creation. And so the mountain joins the dance, filled with the same divine afflatus as the beasts it bears. The dancing earth and the raving animals are not separated from God; the same tide moves in them, and sets them, if need be, against those who attempt to break this communion.

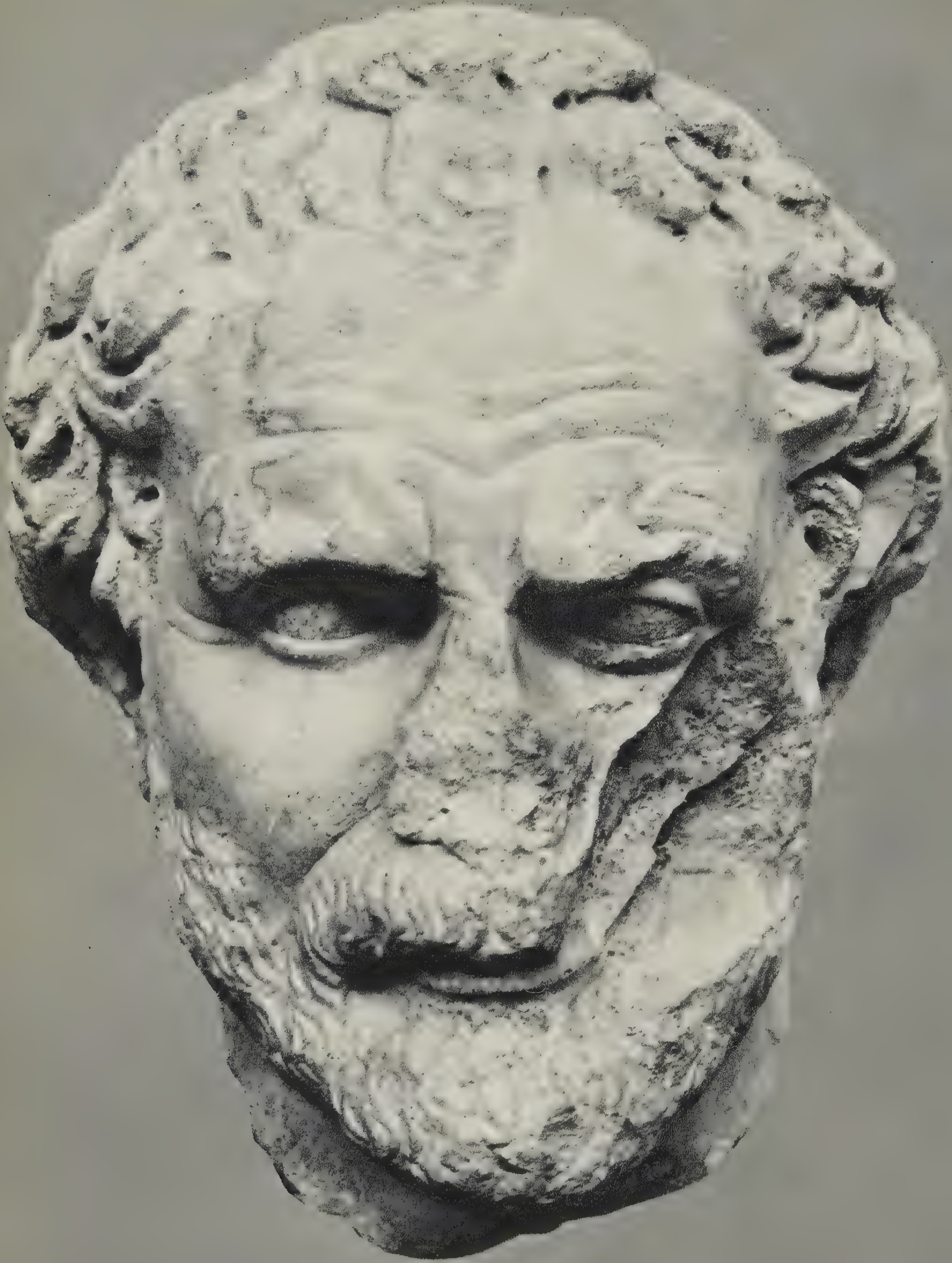
Only man lives separate from nature: therein lies his whole misfortune. For man has shaped for himself, apart from the great whole, a world in isolation which he calls his wisdom. Wisdom is mere folly, because it is separation from God. More than once in his work Euripides has touched on the mystery of folly, and has always defined it as a separation: here the whole of human life, if cut off from God as he is revealed in nature, appears to him as folly.

Let man renounce his wisdom then. For, as one strange verse puts it, 'wisdom is not wisdom', *τὸ σοφὸν δ'οὐ σοφία*. It is not irrelevant to note that the first 'wisdom' here—the so-called wisdom of man—is expressed by a neuter, an intellectualized word, giving this wisdom an artificial character; whereas the word *sophia*, used to denote the wisdom that man recovers if he loses his critical spirit, is a good old word of everyday speech, and a feminine, fit to be the name of a living, fruitful wisdom.

Let man then cease to live alone with his thought. Let him, says the poet, bring his soul into the triumphal procession. The sacred 'orgies' of Bacchus on the mountainside, drawing him out of himself and returning him to his place in the

7. *Profile of a statue of Demosthenes* (*detail*) 280 *B.C.*





cycle of universal life, will give him ecstasy—he will see God. It is by dancing on the dancing earth, by going in wild beasts' skins and garlands of leaves, and allowing the rhythm of the earth and the things born of earth to enter into him, that man will attain the only true wisdom, the folly or Madness of the Mad Ones, *Μανία Μανιάδων*. Himself become mad, that is to say inspired, he will know the presence of God within him. Then nature will pour forth wonderful gifts before him, wine, milk and honey; but her fruitful virtue will be shown above all by the birth of joy.

The knowledge of Bacchus means joy. That is one essential theme of the choruses. Joy of dance and song, joy of the flute and the grape, joy of Aphrodite and joy of the Muses—such is the life opened up to those who renounce the wisdom of the prudent and give themselves to Dionysus in simplicity of heart.

A religion which finds joy in communion with nature—that nature which, to the mind of antiquity, is not a creation of God but herself all divine—such a religion has a name for us: we call it a form of paganism. The name matters little, if it dispenses an authentic religious experience. The sense of the divine, this 'enthusiasm' in the full sense of that word, which is 'God in us', is without any doubt, I believe, attained by Euripides and by us thanks to him, through the poetic power of the choric songs of the *Bacchae*. All the resistance offered to the divine by his reasonable being is carried away on the tide of those songs. I do not think I am mistaken in hearing in them the voice of a soul which for a moment is filled with the presence of God.

Such is the other pole of the tragedy, and of Euripides.

But is this faith of the poet any more than an impulse, a brief flash of certainty on the crest of an impulse? To be certain, we must finish by examining the character of Dionysus, defining his action in the drama and the reactions he arouses in us.

The god that animates nature acts also in the world of men. That world exists; Euripides is too strongly attached to the human, his heart is too stricken by the wretchedness of our condition, to think of doubting that there is a world of men, entitled as such to the attention of the gods. If he sometimes denies the rightness of this world shaped by man in his own way, it is, when all is said and done, only in the brief surges of naturalistic mysticism I have described. In the last resort then, it is by his action in the world of men that Dionysus will be accepted or rejected.

There was in Thebes a human family—grandfather, mother and son united by close bonds of affection. Into this family a god was born; and his own knew him not. Agave laughed, Pentheus persecuted, Cadmus alone yielded. So the god decided to force his kin to confess his divine nature and to punish their disbelief.

He gave repeated signs of his divinity, and signs of his omnipotence. What

8. *Head of Demosthenes. Athens, National Museum*

signs did he give of his justice or his goodness—of his humanity? It is hard to find them; they are unclear and transient impressions; no grace is more hidden than his. True, Dionysus did not resolve on the death of Pentheus from the very beginning; he offered himself to him, a god behind a mask. He warned and threatened; he was patient. Thrown into prison, he still did not strike, but showed new signs—let but the man open his eyes to their clear import, and the god will save him. But Pentheus remains blind to all the signs: and the god strikes him. For blindness, which is another name for the rejection of God, is the unforgivable crime. Not even the rejection of the divine in any shape or form, the churlishness of the dull soul; for Pentheus is a pious man, and it is by no means for atheism that he is punished: but for the rejection of Dionysus, the rejection of this god once born, once offered. Where is the religion in which the rejection of a god once born, once offered, does not merit the mutilation of Pentheus? There is also the dogma of eternal punishment. Such is perhaps the Justice of God: but it is a justice that revolts the faith of Euripides.

And what of Agave, and Cadmus? Agave sinned by some degree of precipitation and defamation of the god. For that Dionysus doomed her first to confess him in the derangement of her body and mind, then to murder her own son and undergo the horrible punishment of recognizing in her hands the head of the child she has killed. As for the devout Cadmus, he is included in the retribution meted out to the wicked. The omnipotence of God is shown in this unfettered liberty.

Euripides is obliged to make up his mind once and for all. Often, in the course of his career, we see him at the crossroads. If God is omnipotence and if omnipotence suffices to justify him, then Dionysus is justified—do what he may; for, as Sophocles says, 'Whatever the gods do, it is never evil.' Faith becomes in this case a kind of religious dread, the thrill perhaps of being overborne by unbridled force. God is that elemental force that makes us dance and sing, and also die, and the world along with us; the pleasure and the pain of life together; the dazzling mystery that strikes us down. So then, renouncing a world all order, reason and clear justice, Euripides must enter the Bacchic rout that knows only the god of ecstasy, and the animal joy of losing self in the cosmic movement of the whole.

But if God in his actions must obey the laws that govern our minds, the law of Mind as it reveals itself to our consciousness, if he is himself consciousness or conscience; if he cannot be other than the perfect expression of our imperfect humanity, not a shadowy abyss open under our feet, but a steady light within us, the acme of justice and love—what of Dionysus then?

There seem to be in the *Bacchae* moments—more numerous the more we read on—when Euripides can bear the tension no longer, torn as he is by the twofold necessity that God should be fulness of life and that he should be the most exalted image of conscience. It is enough, then, for Dionysus to fail to satisfy one of the conditions he lays down for his acceptance, enough for him to appear in the heavens at the close of the tragedy to triumph in his inhuman divinity—Euripides, suddenly, turns away, moved by his love for suffering creation no less than by the moral demands his own mind dictates. That god he rejects.

And in fact, from the scene in which Agave enters, bearing without knowing it the head of her son, we are sure that Euripides will say no. Then comes the moment when, recognizing her son, she utters her cry; and the poet's humanity revolts against the god's inhumanity. Are the gods worse than men? Dionysus now appears to pronounce sentence: but Agave also delivers her judgment. Face to face with the god who condemns her, she proclaims:

It fits not that in wrath Gods be as men.[1]

Certainly, too much has been made of this verse. It is taking it too far to make it give its meaning to the whole tragedy, let alone to make Euripides into an unbeliever, and the play into a piece of propaganda against religion. The verse, expressing as it does exactly what Agave feels at a given moment, represents also only one moment in the thought of Euripides. It is true that moment is decisive. The balance of the tragedy has dipped, and Euripides has made his choice.

Euripides passionately desired to believe: his whole work proves it. That faith he did possess: his *Bacchae* comprehends the greatness of God revealed in his omnipotence. Yet his humanity, his compassion for suffering, his moral conscience—why not call it his faith in man?—forbade him to find assurance in that other faith, through which he could lose himself in God. The *Bacchae* is the most passionate impulse that ever raised Euripides towards the divine: it is also the most painful of his earthward falls. Though perhaps we should not give the name of fall to this standing erect in the face of God. For, of a truth, he does not deny the existence of this god whom he has felt. He knows that he has existence, a terrible existence. He simply finds that this god is no concern of his. Should he look for another?

Rather, does he not possess another already? What else is that inner fire that makes his whole work glow with pure love for mankind?

No tragedy by Euripides tells us more than this does of the response of his genius to all the solicitations of life. None shows better how Euripides was a poet as Plato taught that men should be philosophers, 'with the whole soul'. The characters he creates afford release to the opposing forces of his nature. However violently in conflict the demands of his being, he accepts them all. And it is because he will deny none, because he is willing to live in this cruel tension, that he is a tragic poet.

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 117.

CHAPTER FOUR

THUCYDIDES AND THE WAR OF THE CITY-STATES

A new voice comes to bear its part in this drama of declining Greece: that of a judge supremely clear-sighted and upright, the greatest historian of the ancient world and one of the greatest of all time—Thucydides.

The Renaissance had almost forgotten him. The sixteenth century took pleasure rather in the copious reportages of the picturesque Herodotus, spread thinly over all the highroads of the earth, than in the austere and aristocratic severity of Thucydides, the great judge of his own time and ours. Montaigne and Rabelais are unaware of his name. Later on, what could the *Histoire universelle* of Bossuet, or the *Siècle de Louis XIV* of Voltaire, be expected to make of the conception of a historical law, as Thucydides propounds it? For the first of these, the history of humanity is the plan of God, for the second, the will of the ruler. Hardly even Montesquieu. . . .

So it was left for the learned nineteenth century to exhume Thucydides. It hailed in him one of its own inventions, the idea of scientific history, of the *objective* knowledge of the past; and for us, sons of the nineteenth century, Thucydides has become the ideal historian, the embodiment of pure Objectivity (with a capital letter of course).

So he is, apart from a few fine distinctions, and also a few omissions. In the first place, the history we are living through has taught us that absolute objectivity is incredible and impossible, especially for a historian who has to write of his own times and recount a great war. It is simpler and better to say that Thucydides is a very impartial historian in so far as his age, his character and his education made that possible.

On the other hand, while a great historian, he is also and perhaps primarily a great artist. He writes the *Peloponnesian War* in the manner of a drama in three acts—as indeed it was, and as he discovered that it was while it was still being waged. In this drama four or five characters stand in the front line, no more. The war of the city-states is not treated in the Shakespearian manner, with many contrasts between great numbers of different figures: it is treated—as we might have expected—with the economical technique of classical tragedy. That is to say, four or five individual characters (four of them in Athens) suffice to elucidate entirely the essence of the drama; unless we add the expressive figures of the warring peoples, sketched in unforgettable lines.

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To take an example—and to give a more tangible idea of Thucydides' art as a portraitist—here are two of his Athenian characters, whose masks, executed with more care and detail, relegate their useless understudies to the background, or to oblivion. The principle of selection, to which any historian must have recourse to avoid overcrowding, is carried very much further by Thucydides than it would be by a modern historian. These selected figures—sketched in linear fashion, but firmly—are at the same time, in this war-history of wide application, the symbolic pictures of the politician in all democracies or pseudo-democracies.

Nicias, the leader of the Athenian conservative party—Nicias is an honest man, or at least attaches great importance to being thought one. His mind has no great width, being limited to the practice, not to say the routine, of his trade of general. But war, as Thucydides tells us with emphasis, is 'the realm of the unpredictable'. The political figure must be ready to deal with these hazards. Nicias, for his part, gives the impression, not of reckoning with chance and the unforeseeable, but of reckoning *on* chance to take his place and make the decisions he always shrinks from making. For it is not merely his intellect which is deficient—he lacks energy, and life pulses only languidly in his worn body. Worn, partly by age and sickness (in the letter asking the Athenians for his recall he blames his kidney disease for the disaster into which he had led the Sicilian expedition). But the root of the evil is congenital rather—Nicias is timid when faced with the need to act. This man who, because of his greed for honours, has taken upon himself the heavy responsibilities of party leader and army leader, is constantly paralysed in his activity by his fear of these very Athenians he is leading. In his eternal irresolution, he always seems to choose the slowest course, as if he feared nothing so much as attaining his goal. If he acts, it is always out of season. When he ought to stay before Syracuse and push on the siege with energy, Nicias asks the Athenians to recall him. When the situation has become so dangerous for the Athenian army that he ought to quit without ado, almost without stopping to think, Nicias speaks in favour of staying. Full of patriotism, for all that (even if he is a little too apt to confuse the good of his country and his own prestige), religious, like the Athenian of the old school that he is (and even superstitious)—but these virtues of the average decent man do not save him from being a weakling, misled by love of political fame. Thucydides draws a portrait of him which might at times excite admiration—he has the courage of a private soldier, and he can face death bravely in inglorious circumstances—were his praises not tempered by a whole series of minor reservations. Thus, in an aside of faintly disdainful tone, 'Nicias was rather over-inclined to divination and such things.'[1] This 'rather over-inclined' is the height of sarcasm from the pen of Thucydides, who makes no mystery of the fact that he himself is not so inclined at all.

At the close our historian awards Nicias a kind of certificate of good conduct, and stresses the irony of fate which doomed this man, so conformist by nature, to be ignominiously executed as a captured general after letting his army be taken prisoner by the enemy.—With this judgment, implied but not stated, that, to be a great leader, it is perhaps not enough to be a good fellow.

At the opposite pole to Nicias is Cleon (or it could be Alcibiades). Cleon the clever, the ruthless logician, whom Thucydides dislikes, but to whom he has done the honour of attributing, in the course of one of his reported speeches, his own philosophy of history (as he has done in one of the speeches of Pericles)—Cleon knows, and proves, that a great Empire can only be founded and endure on injustice. He asserts that states holding power cannot, without risk, admit the grievances of the cities in revolt against them—cannot afford to show themselves suddenly just, humane and generous. In truth Athens has no other choice, when Mytilene breaks away from her, than that between justice and empire, between Mytilene and her own existence. Cleon's proposal is to break Mytilene by bloody reprisals which will spread terror of the name of Athens through the whole Hellenic world.

But in its logical strictness Cleon's speech is too black-and-white. The speaker's eloquence and thought defy reality in some degree, even though he talks much of the necessity of being realistic; Cleon is a doctrinaire, a 'Jacobin' with a complete system of ideas in his head, ready-made and impervious to the lessons of experience. This man who is always giving lectures to others, but will never consent to learn from anything or anyone, smacks of the pedant. It has been said of his speech against Mytilene, 'it is the discourse of a puffed-up pedagogue'. Such is the cast of his mind—inflexible and sectarian.

But there is much more in Cleon than an intellect: he has incredible energy, unbridled audacity. He exudes prodigious vitality and health in all his violent behaviour, which attracts and repels at once. Cleon does not fear violence, he cultivates it; he is, says Thucydides, 'the most violent' of popular orators; he is always calling for fresh executions, massacres of civilians, pitiless reprisals. Indeed this impenitent apostle of violence is afraid of nothing, not even dishonour; unlike Nicias who fears it more than anything else, and does not even fear death if it will restore his beloved reputation. Cleon, we may say, is not afraid to be a coward. At the battle of Amphipolis, Thucydides shows him resolved 'from the start' to get away and save his skin at any cost; and he makes off, with the main body of the army. Little he cares what gibes his action will earn him: he is quite capable of imposing silence on the scoffers.

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[1] *The Peloponnesian War:* a new translation by Rex Warner, Penguin Classics, 1954, p. 464.

In a scene related in tones of bitter sarcasm, Thucydides has shown Nicias and Cleon contending before the popular assembly. Nicias has been unsuccessful, in spite of very long efforts with the strong sea and land forces he has raised, in forcing a handful of Spartans, besieged in the island of Sphacteria, to capitulate. Cleon blusters: 'If only the generals' (with a meaning gesture towards Nicias) 'were real men—' the thing would be already done: and if *he* were general. . . ! Nicias takes him up, resigns his command and offers it to his enemy. Cleon is at a loss for a second, while the people jeer. Nicias offers a second time. Then Cleon, regaining his compusure, goes up into the speakers' tribune and undertakes that, with the small force of auxiliaries he asks for, he will, in twenty days, bring the Lacedaemonians alive as prisoners to Athens (a thing that had never been seen), or massacre them in the island. The people laughed at his boast: but Cleon kept his word. Throughout the whole scene the demeanour of that disdainful aristocrat, Nicias, is contrasted with Cleon's 'guts', his healthy plebeian vigour.

These gifts of Cleon's and this undeniable strength that is in him, are not given in the service of the common weal for nothing. True, Cleon is no traitor like the brilliant Alcibiades, the gambler Alcibiades. Cleon, strong as he is, does not feel strong enough to act the traitor: he is a 'patriot', and of the touchiest kind—he would like to persuade the people that he has the monopoly of 'patriotism'. But we must say at least that his patriotism is not unalloyed—Cleon loves power (Thucydides does not say money, as Aristophanes does of the same Cleon) as much as his city, and more. If he plunges Athens into adventurous courses, it is because the state of war, and the confusion and trouble it brings, enable him to strike down his political opponents and consolidate his personal power. Let us say, more plainly still, that Cleon's temperament is attuned to the violence of war, to its fundamental brutality. We may even ask whether, in him, the intellect does not (unconsciously) attempt to subject political reality to over-rigid patterns simply for the sake of arousing resistance and disorder, and thus satisfying his craving for violence.

Thus the characters of Thucydides, like those of a great novelist, never cease to set us problems and require explanation, simply because we feel them to be alive.

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There is no end to what could be said about the art of Thucydides. I shall only add that the strange vivid style he invented fits the form of his thought exactly. He thinks and writes in a binary rhythm—everything is expressed in symmetrical constructions: though into them he introduces, to keep our attention and obtain variety, 'asymmetrical' elements which restore life to any excessive verbalism arising from the play of contrasts. In other words, Thucydides thinks and writes dialectically, for ever carrying on a persistent interior debate with himself to attain the truth. The sentences at first reading are obscure by their very concentration, density and apparent contradictions, but suddenly become clear if the reader plunges in and lets himself be guided through the labyrinth of light and shade. Few characters and few situations seem to Thucydides simple and unequivocal; every person offers two aspects. A last point: we must not think that the history of the war between Athens and her enemies is Thucydides' only theme, for it is not. Possession or loss of the things that are the most necessary to us—bread, liberty, glory—that is the subject of the tense debate which we are made to follow. At times the strain is resolved in sentences as massive and brilliant as marble: here is one out of a hundred such, simple and forthright like a ladder, a sentence spoken by Pericles to the Athenian citizens.

> *Make up your minds that happiness depends only on being free, and freedom depends on being courageous* [*; and*] *let there be no relaxation in face of the perils of the war.*[1]

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But there is another feature of Thucydides' history worthy of attention: it is meant to be *useful*, the author says so. A celebrated passage in his preface states that his 'work is not a piece of writing designed to meet the taste of an immediate public, but was done to last for ever'[2]—*κτῆμα ἐς ἀεί*, a gift of value to later generations. In what way? Thucydides is convinced that there are laws of history, and that these laws are intelligible. To know them is to acquire power to act on history, just as to know the laws of physics is to acquire the power of acting on the physical world—on nature. Thucydides writes for the Athenian citizens, the sovereign people of Athens, to give their politicians knowledge of the laws which, on the historical plane, rule the actions of individuals and peoples. This is the 'possession for ever', the 'gift' of value—the *ktêma*—with which he is endowing the men of the future, to use according to their lights and for the best interests of the city.

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 121.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 24–5.

From this conception of history—which, in addition, is to be rational—arises the lack of any supernatural element in Thucydides. It is easy to see the immense difference between such a history and that of Herodotus, as we have described it earlier. It is no chance that the delightful *Enquiries* of the latter are brimful of supernatural marvels. The author's devout faith sees no reason why divine power should not intervene at will in the course of events, according to its own nature which is capricious; so that divine action suspends the action of historical laws. For Thucydides, if that is admitted all science becomes impossible. He has been called an atheist: but any scientist, *quâ* scientist, is obliged to be an atheist, in the sense that he has not to concern himself with God. At the base of his history written for use, there is a working hypothesis which is rationalistic—it posits that the laws of history are in general agreement with those of our reason.

In this attempt to use the language of reason to his people Thucydides takes his place beside his great contemporaries, Anaxagoras, Leucippus, Democritus and Hippocrates for instance, the generation which conceived the grand design of founding, on rational bases, a science useful to man. He has, moreover, been profoundly influenced by these savants and thinkers. He is in everything the son and representative of the age of enlightenment. He has meditated on the adage of Leucippus: 'Nothing occurs at random, but everything for a reason and by necessity.' More still is he influenced by Hippocrates and the physicians. We have material proof of this in the medical terminology used by him in the description of the outbreak of the so-called plague in Athens, and in other passages. The very notion of historical law in Thucydides is more akin to those evolved by the school of Hippocrates than to the more mechanistic conceptions of the school of Leucippus and Democritus. In his search for laws, Thucydides, like Hippocrates, arrives at the idea of relative laws. Read this sentence of his preface:

> *It will be enough for me, however, if these words of mine are judged useful by those who want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will, at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future.*[1]

The originality of Thucydides consists perhaps essentially in this—he transported the methods and spirit of science properly so called (physical science, medicine) into the field of history which was still dominated by supernatural explanations. As Socrates was endeavouring to make ethics into a science, so Thucydides endeavoured to make history an exact science, or almost so. A tremendous undertaking, perhaps too ambitious.

The whole explanation of history is made, then, to depend principally on knowledge of human nature, knowledge of man as he is found living in society. Of course, man may be placed in different environments, with different beliefs, needs and institutions; and it is important to examine such differences—Thucydides takes great trouble to do so. But in the last resort it is always man, whatever his variations according to place and time, who holds the key to history. Only because his nature is relatively stable can we hope to establish laws for developments in the future. One such law is formulated by Thucydides with this significant reservation: 'While human nature is what it is.' This reservation shows better than anything else how cautiously the historian uses his working hypothesis.

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 24.

I do not know whether the reader begins to grasp how majestic, and at the same time how strictly conceived (the very reverse of chimerical) was the undertaking of Thucydides. In founding history as a useful science, he was asserting that man bears in his own nature the principal causes for his successes and failures recorded in history. The historian would educate the public leaders of the future (he seems to be writing for a Demosthenes); he would teach the rulers of Athens how to read the workings of human passions; in so doing he is giving them an instrument, or a weapon, of great value. Will men's intelligence prove able to set aside popular beliefs about divine intervention—as manifested by oracles or in eclipses—and detect regularity and law, in the confused process of history? More important, will this knowledge of the laws of history—which is the knowledge of the passions, needs and institutions of men—enable it to modify the course of events still in progress, and put right the failures of history? Thucydides' aim, history as a useful science, does imply that power to foresee and correct the future.

But here we must not forget one most important fact. What is the subject of Thucydides' enquiry?—The history of the birth, formation and growth of an empire, that of Athens. He had seen the birth and extension of this Empire as the birth of a hope for the Hellenic world. Would Athens become the head and the reasonable guide of the community of Greek peoples? Would she, in the same burst of energy which had carried her to victory over Persia in the war of independence, forge the union of all Greeks without too much wounding the pride of the city-states? Would she draw the Greeks into her wake by persuasion or impose her rule by force? Such questions may have put themselves to Thucydides as he was collecting his materials and beginning to write. The moment came when Athens, dizzy with greatness or else miscalculating her power, set out to add territories in Sicily to the Empire she already possessed in the Eastern Mediterranean. She threw all her resources into the struggle, all her ships and, soon after, all her armies; and she failed utterly. Her eternal adversaries of the Peloponnese, of Boeotia, Corinth and elsewhere rushed in to the kill; her subjects and allies forsook her and revolted. Attica was invaded, Athens was taken. History had spoken and given the answer only too plainly. What Thucydides had before his eyes, and what he recorded, was not merely the formation and greatness of an empire, but its collapse. He had not known, in 431, when war broke out and he began to collect documents for his history; but he knew in 404, now that Athens was laid low. These twenty-seven years, this Peloponnesian war, amount in the end to the failure of Greek unity under Athens, the failure of Athenian imperialism, in a word the ruin of the Greece of the city-states. Thucydides recasts a few sentences of the first part of his work, already composed, to bring this out. A notable addition is this expression, in his analysis of the causes:

> *But the real reason for the war is, in my opinion, most likely to be disguised by such an argument. What made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta.*[1]

So Thucydides augments the responsibility of the Athenians by attributing to them an imperialism that was out of proportion to the relative strengths of the Greek states. In addition he tends from now on to read darker and darker interpretations into this language of the passions, which spells the laws of history.

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When all is said and done, then, what is this human nature in his view? What is this creature man, who makes history?

Man, like any living creature, contains one primary force which he accepts as an essential requirement of his being—the desire to live. And to live means, in the first place, to *continue*, to have increased security of existence: as Thucydides remarks, man will only risk death to escape death. In the second place, to live is to obtain the good things of life; in other words, to *possess*.

To possess, and to continue, are the essential urges of the vital instinct. They can be combined in one word—*interest*. Self-interest is the motive subtending all human activity; all other motives have their root in it. There is not a man of action in Thucydides who, when he has to act on crowds and reach the hidden mainsprings of the heart, does not end by using words such as interest or its synonyms—utility, gain, advantage. These words are the *Leitmotiv* of the whole work.

What Thucydides asserts of the individual, he asserts still more strongly of the corporate bodies and political societies which are the true subject of history.

For what is the city, the nation, or the State? An association of interests, a sum of individual interests. The State for Thucydides is not by any means, as some are too ready to say of the ancient city, a new entity with its own interest. The State is not an entity, but the setting for a contract—a contract between individual interests, which can find better safeguards in the setting of a city than in any other What Thucydides' orators seek to demonstrate, in any peril of the city, is that the interest of the State is the same thing as the interests of individuals, because the individual's well-being or even his life will be destroyed in the ruin of the city, while they are favoured by its prosperity.

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 25.

But having made that reservation he cannot but observe that the city, being the sum of the interests of individuals, obeys the same impulses as individuals—it too wants to possess and to continue.

It goes without saying that it does not occur to Thucydides to feel indignation at this demand which he discovers to be at the heart of political activity. A scientist cannot feel indignation about a natural law. His own researches have brought him face to face with a biological truth—the discovery that human societies seek to live; and he studies them from that angle, because it seems to him that this point of view accounts for the whole activity of cities at war. All the rest—including ethics, and so on—is nothing to him, once he finds that this law which he intends to use as a hypothesis explaining history does explain the great majority of facts.

Moreover he takes the greatest care to put this law which he has discovered into the mouths of a large number of characters in his history—statesmen very different from one another, fighting for different causes and diverse in character, some of whom, perhaps, he did not particularly like. It is by this kind of universal consent that Thucydides maintains the appearance of objectivity, and gives the historical law its universal application.

Consider the speeches of Pericles: we may take the discourse made no later than the second year of the war, to defend the imperialist policy against the anger of the people when—so soon!—it seemed to be leading to disaster. He says in effect, 'Our fathers founded an empire—to live. We are forced to preserve and even extend that empire. No doubt our empire is founded on injustice; we constantly have to face the hate of our subjects; but were we to be just for a single instant, not only would our empire crumble but we should lose our liberty and even our lives. We have today only one choice before us—to rule as tyrants or to disappear.' It is a justification of imperialism—not on the plane of ethics, of course, but on that of life.

This statement of Pericles is entirely confirmed by that of Cleon on which I have already touched; and no less by that of a mortal enemy of Athens, the great Syracusan patriot Hermocrates. We might expect to find him incensed at the ambition of Athens, and her unjustified claim to Sicily. Nothing of the sort: he tells the Syracusans,

Now it is perfectly understandable that the Athenians should have these ambitions

> *and should be making their plans accordingly. I am not blaming those who are resolved to rule. . . . For men in general it is always natural to take control when there is no resistance.*[1]

The right of conquest is justified by natural instinct. It is clear, if I may so express myself, that Hermocrates has read Thucydides.

So it is no chance that Thucydides chose as his subject the destiny of an empire. The birth, growth and destruction of an empire are for him the opportunity to examine the political phenomenon in its pure state, and in its real greatness—a greatness, let me repeat, which does not belong to the order of ethics, but to that of life. The growth of a city and its imperialism seem to have struck Thucydides as a sight that pleases the eyes, just as it is pleasant to watch a youth eating—his appetite is sufficient justification in itself. Any living city tends towards the condition of empire; it would be absurd to arrest its development—on what pretext? Thucydides could not bring himself to do it, for to arrest it, we read time and time again, is to condemn it to death.

Alcibiades says it once more, in the speech urging the Sicilian expedition:

> *It is not possible for us to calculate, like housekeepers, exactly how much empire we want to have. The fact is that we have reached a stage where we are forced to plan new conquests and forced to hold on to what we have got, because there is a danger that we ourselves may fall under the power of others unless others are in our power.*[2]

In other words to live, for a state, is to engage at every moment in some new trial of its strength. 'No city', as Alcibiades also says, 'can exist in inertia.'

So life is dynamic—to conquer someone else is the only way in which a people can assert its own quality. The same Greek word πλεονεκτεῖν, which occurs not seldom in our author, means at the same time *get the better of*, and *excel*. The fact that nothing of all this bears any relation to international law and justice, has, I assume, already been made quite clear. History is the display of the will to live, or the conflict of different wills to live.

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But is there, in Thucydides' world which up to this point appears so anarchic, no force able to harmonize the chaos of conflicting wills to live; no force imposing some *order* on the expansion of sheer vital vigour?

Such a force does exist undeniably; it is seen in the acts of a small number of great men who are able to make certain peoples adopt decisions such as the situation requires. This force is the power of *mind*: in the recent past it had existed in the person of Themistocles; it existed, to an eminent degree, in Pericles. In him, linked as it was with love of country and operating in complete disinterestedness, it would certainly have won the Athenian war, had Pericles not died prematurely. The mind of Pericles, knowing and regulating the passions of the city, making due allowance for chance or ruling it out by correct forecasting—able, too, to riposte boldly against the strokes of chance—the mind of Pericles, in Thucydides' opinion, would have ensured success to the history of Athens of a certainty. But are there really such 'certainties' in the history of peoples? And can we admit that the contests of history can thus be won thanks to the acts of a single individual?

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 264.

[2] Trans. cited, p. 379.

Even so, the war then won would never have been anything other than the victory of Athenian imperialism. Here we see the inability of Thucydides to rise above the conception of the *city*; he cannot shake himself free of it, any more than the Greece of his day.

The conclusion of this *History of the Peloponnesian War*—left unfinished by the author, who was carried off himself by that uncalculated chance, death—is written in advance, in two important passages of the work as he has left it. The first, an addition made to the first part of the book after the end of the war, is that in which, summing up the record of Pericles, he compares his influence with that of his successors.

> *After his death his foresight with regard to the war became even more evident. For Pericles had said that Athens would be victorious if she bided her time and took care of her navy, if she avoided trying to add to the empire during the course of the war, and if she did nothing to risk the safety of the city itself. But his successors did the exact opposite. . . . The reason for this was that Pericles, because of his position, his intelligence, and his known integrity, could respect the liberty of the people and at the same time hold them in check. It was he who led them, rather than they who led him, and since he never sought power from any wrong motive, he was under no necessity of flattering them: in fact he was so highly respected that he was able to speak angrily to them and to contradict them. . . . So, in what was nominally a democracy, power was really in the hands of the first citizen.*[1]

That is a magnificent eulogy of Pericles; but it is linked to the observation that the state of government in Athens—which was democracy at its peak—was such as to make it impossible for it to win the war into which he had led it unless that democracy was in some sort 'rectified' by the presence at its head of a mind that the author shows, throughout his story, as being quite above the common. And in saying this, does he not by implication condemn democracy, now past its best and entering upon its period of decline?

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[1] Trans. cited, pp. 134–5.

Here is the second passage to which I wish to draw attention. It is the description of the disturbance in Corcyra, and it displays his penetrating powers of analysis—so great that what he says of the effects of war on the mentalities of cities towards the end of the fifth century holds for the cities in the following century, that of Demosthenes, as it will still hold for our situation today. Particularly in its incisive remarks on the changed senses of words (and of the values they stand for), which are a phenomenon characteristic of any decadence in political life.

> *In the various cities these revolutions were the cause of many calamities—as happens and as always will happen while human nature is what it is, though there may be different degrees of savagery, and, as different circumstances arise, the general rules will admit of some variety. . . . War is a stern teacher; in depriving them of the power of easily satisfying their daily wants, it brings most people's minds down to the level of their actual circumstances. . . . To fit in with the change of events, words, too, had to change their usual meanings. What used to be described as a thoughtless act of aggression was now regarded as the courage one would expect to find in a party member. . . . Fanatical enthusiasm was the mark of a real man. . . . Neither side had any use for conscientious motives.*[1]

So came about the disintegration of the cities and world of the cities; and, through the war of the cities and the internal discords that followed it, the destruction of the whole of Greece.

We shall see one more man (deeply imbued with the spirit of Thucydides) endeavour to save Athens and Greece with her—Demosthenes. It is a heroic, but a desperate attempt. Others will go on trying to explore other paths of salvation for the city; the greatest of them, Plato, will join thought and act, attempting in his works to set forth the picture of an ideal state while he tries, with the support of a ruler who is his friend, to govern an actual city.

But the proportion of intellectual speculation and sheer imagination remains too high for Plato's ideas to take shape in reality, in his time at least.

The work of Thucydides is not, then, the history of the triumph of Athens: it is perhaps something finer—at the time when the failure of Athenian democracy and Athenian greatness are becoming apparent, it is the triumph of the mind of man, judging the history of Athens, taking cognisance of its failure, and endeavouring to distinguish the causes.

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[1] Trans. cited, pp. 208–10.

CHAPTER FIVE

DEMOSTHENES AND THE END OF THE WORLD OF CITY-STATES

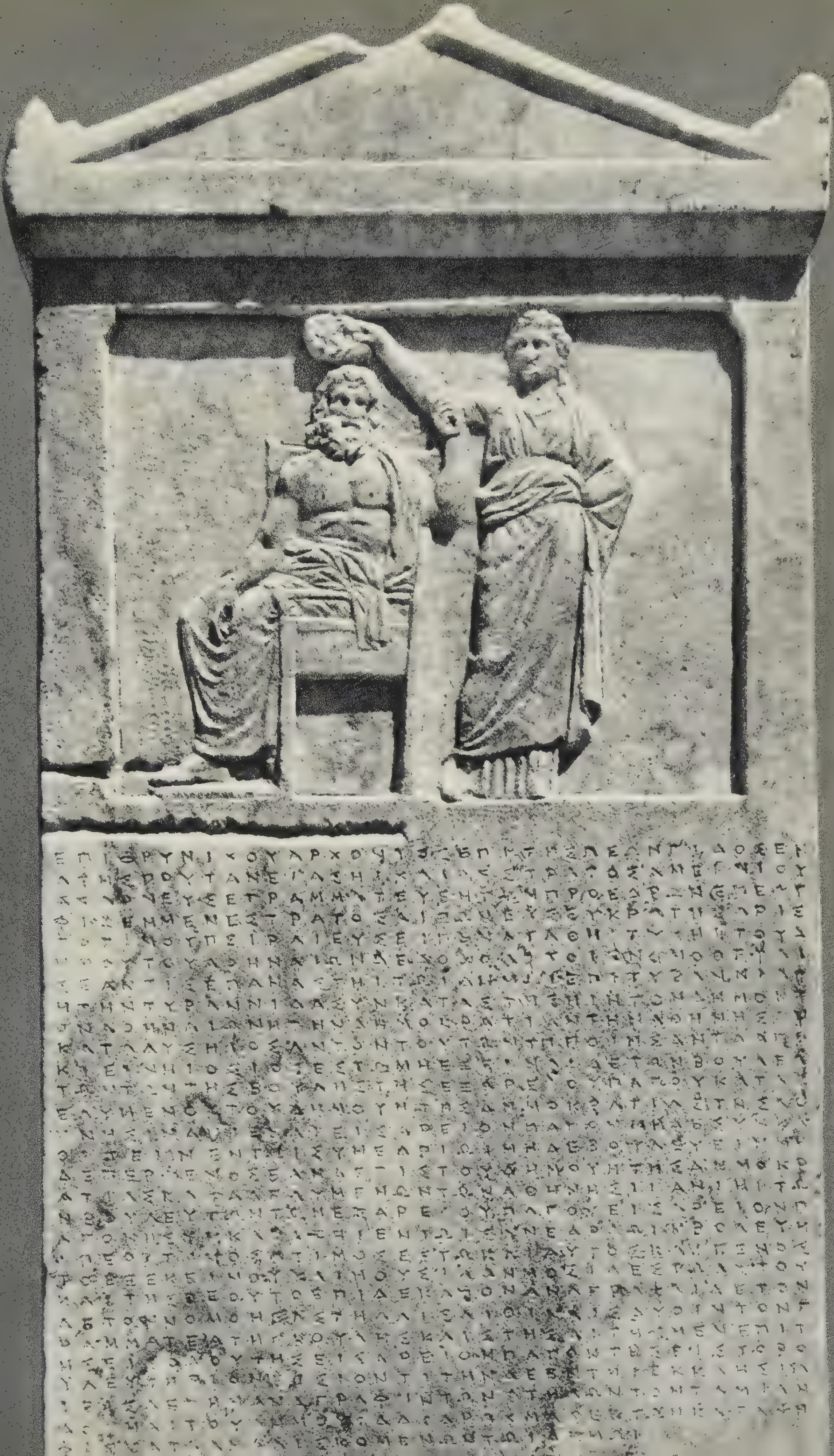
Some men's lives and actions seem to be borne on the tide of history, so that whatever they utter or whatever enterprise they undertake, however apparently spontaneous, is attuned beforehand to the historical trends which their peoples are obeying. Such a man is Alexander: a pre-established harmony seems to have existed between his political designs and the destinies of Greek civilization, carried by him to the farthest confines of the known world.

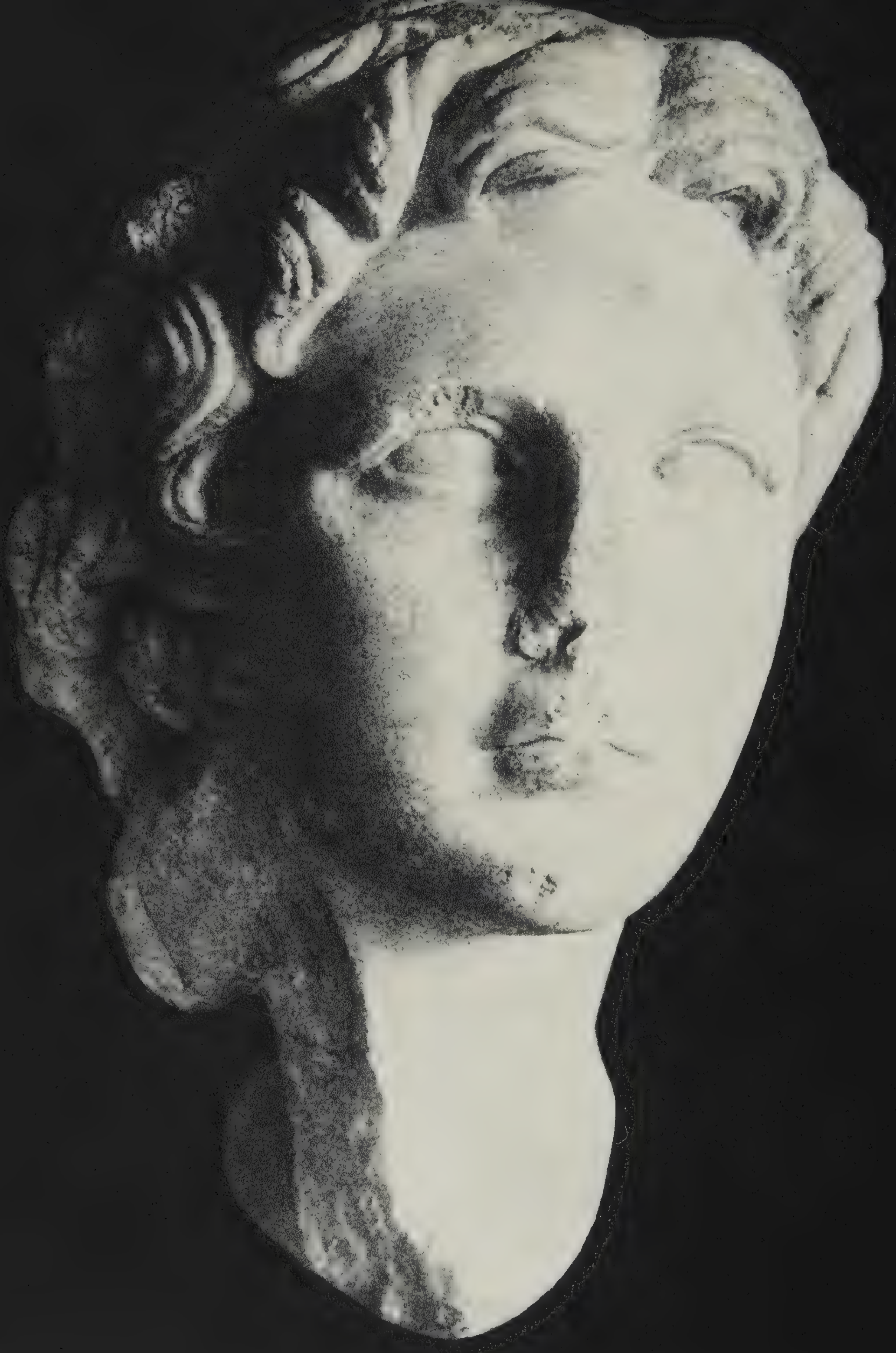
Demosthenes is of the opposite sort. His courageous political action and his wonderful eloquence are set in a historical context which condemns them in advance and, if I may put it so, denies them. Everything is against him; and his victories, won late in the day over a worn-out people, his unequal struggle with Philip of Macedonia, and even his genius as an orator, seem wrested from his own natural disadvantages, and from adverse fortune, and from history, by which he sees he is rejected.

Bereaved of his father at the age of seven, and cheated of a fairly handsome patrimony by dishonest guardians, he learned rhetoric and law to recover it, but never obtained more than fragments. He earned his living in the unrewarding craft of logographer—that is to say, he wrote court speeches for clients to make before the judges. Some are pleas in political cases; in them we find, it is true, many forensic shifts and subtleties, but also certain features peculiar to Demosthenes—a high code of political ethics, reminders that privilege should be only the reward for services rendered, unyielding respect for the national honour of Athens, love of peace, but not of peace at any price, and on the other hand the rejection of any policy of withdrawal by Athens, for whom Demosthenes still foretells, on certain conditions, an era of greatness.

As a child he had been delicate, and his mother had been afraid to let him join in the exercises of the palaestra. His health was never good, and there is nothing more moving than to study his physical appearance as recorded by a statue erected in

9. *The people of Athens crowned by Democracy: stele discovered in the Agora* (336 *B.C.*). *American School of Classical Studies*
10. (Overleaf, left) *Bust of Alexander as a young man, by Lysippus* (*middle of the* 4*th Century*). *Paris, Guimet Museum*
11. (Overleaf, right) *Bust of Plato. Private property. Geneva, Boehringer Collection*





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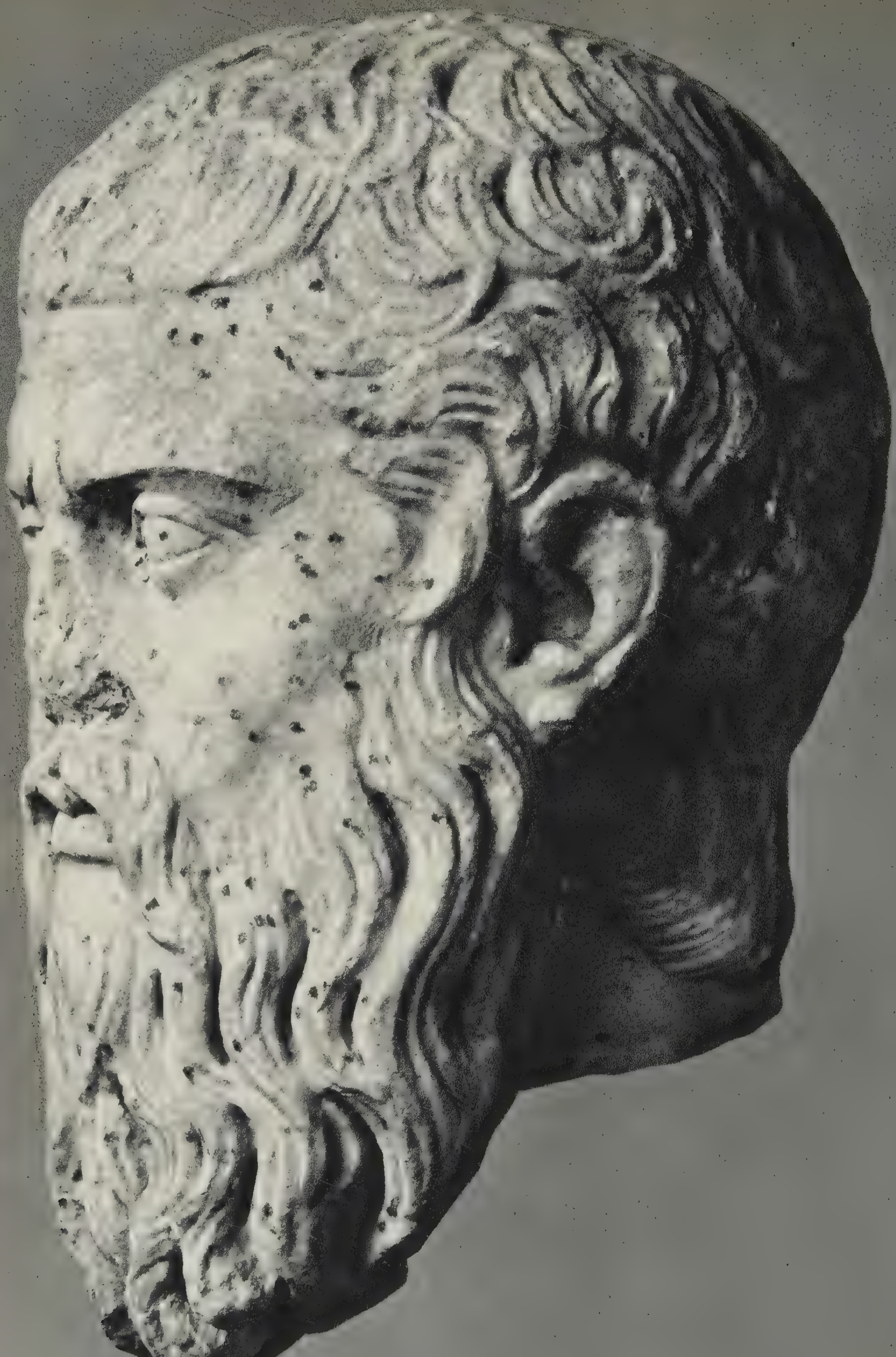

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his honour not many years after his death—the thin face, the sunken cheeks, the narrow chest and one raised shoulder are those of a sick man: and this is the greatest orator of Athens, one of the greatest men of action bred by this city, and the last who tried to give her courage. But a will of iron inhabited this weakly frame. Looking at him, we can understand how tradition attributes to him a sombre cast of mind, and a love of solitude which he was forced to overcome time and time again for the sake of Athens, when he threw himself into political strife. We can understand too the scornful sobriquet of 'water-drinker' flung at him by his adversary Aeschines.

Among the physical handicaps of this born orator were serious speech defects! Under the stress of emotion, his articulation became indistinct, his tongue stumbled over certain syllables and he stammered. (Look at his receding lower lip, drawn back against the gum—a frequent sign of stammerers.) What was worse, he was short of breath and had to draw it in the middle of his sentences; although he composed them long and intricate, comprehensible only if declaimed from end to end in a single flow, with only short rests to give stress to words displaced from their logical order, the movement of the period accelerating as it approached its goal, and hitting it, at the final word, with the impact of a bullet. He had the will-power to train himself until he had gained control of his tongue and breathing, and his shoulder, which was affected with a nervous tic. His first speeches had made the populace laugh: he soon became one of the most influential speakers in the assembly.

There, his speeches, with keen foresight, announced the ambition of Philip, showing him as the liquidator of the world of the cities and the future master of Greece—united and grouped at last, but under his yoke.

Philip of Macedonia was a man of great personal charm, which affected even Demosthenes when the two met. We have preserved no portrait of him; but those of his son Alexander show (if one may judge of the father by the son) marks of very high 'breeding'—a face and body with great delicacy of line and rare elegance, suggesting tremendous energy. Did Philip also possess Alexander's splendid brow, crowned with a royal, or a leonine, mane? In any case the father, like the son, carried bravery to the point of madness, and had unlimited endurance. Philip was an astonishing horseman and, unlike Demosthenes, a drinker to be reckoned with.

He was king of a peasant people and an uncouth, quarrelsome nobility. Strange usages still lingered in his court at Pella: the man who had not killed a wild boar with his own hands was not admitted to the king's table; the man who had not slain an enemy in battle wore a fine cord around his waist as a sign of dishonour. The Greeks looked on the Macedonians as Barbarians; yet they spoke a Greek dialect, we gather, though it was so distorted that Greeks could not understand it.

12. *Bust of Plato*

Philip's culture was in complete contrast to that of his entourage. He had had a Greek upbringing, while held as a hostage at Thebes—for during the fourth century, in which each of the three great Greek cities had its moment as a great power on a minute scale, Thebes had its turn after Sparta and Athens. There Philip had learned from the conquerors of moment—Pelopidas, Epaminondas—the arts of war and rhetoric, letters and philosophy. He summoned artists and poets to his court. As tutor for his son he chose Aristotle, who was to teach the whole mediaeval West how to think, and the Arab world as well. He made much play of his love of literature in his approaches to the Greeks, posing as a convinced 'philhellene'.

He was also a good general, but above all an astute diplomat, abounding in shifts and deceits of all kinds. It was by diplomacy and corruption far more than by force of arms that he was to make himself master of Greece; for him, we remember, 'no town was impregnable if a mule laden with gold could be got in'. Demosthenes declared that it was less dangerous to be at war with Philip than to sign the firmest treaty with him. Philip knew the art of dragging out negotiations interminably, and, while they continued, he continued to take town after town. He was profuse in promises which he was determined never to keep. He knew how to obtain the essential by making trifling concessions—and making them usually at the expense of a third party.

He knew the art of dividing his opponents, turning them against one another by bringing up old grudges—never very difficult between Greeks. He was patient: he could work up a situation over a long period, give events time to ripen, then, when the fruit was ready, pluck it quickly and suddenly by force.

Above all he knew how to make war while keeping up the appearances of peace. Peace was the first and most dangerous of his machines of war—as Demosthenes clearly discerned, seeing through one of the normal tricks of all imperialists.

From the first days of his reign Philip had aimed straight at the heart of Athens, realizing at once that Athens, weak or strong, was the head of Greece, and that once she was struck down Greece would succumb with her. But most often he did not level his blows directly at the fallen queen, preferring to take her vassals by treachery one by one. His favourite theatre of operations was Thrace or the approaches to Byzantium, regions which, as is well known, had long been necessary to the economic life of Athens—and were even more so in the fourth than in the fifth century, with the increase of the urban and decrease of the rural population, and the ever-increasing demands of the ease-loving citizenry.

But, in this first half of the fourth century, Thrace and the Straits were not only necessary to the normal life of Athens, they had come to be the emblems of her greatness and in some sort the compensation of her ambition, which was as incurable as her sloth. They were in any case the nucleus of the fragile new Empire that she had lately begun to form, known as the Second Athenian Confederacy.

Philip's first attacks and threats were made here. Demosthenes' counter-attack, in the *Philippics*, is directed against the same point. The campaign of the *Philippics* was to last some ten years, during most of which there was no state of war declared between Athens and Philip. The use of peace as a weapon of war is what Demosthenes sets himself to unmask. This is how the orator spoke in 341:

> *If the country may be at peace, if it depends on us (to begin with this), I say we ought to maintain peace, and I call upon the affirmant to move a resolution, to take some measure, and not to palter with us. But if another, having arms in his hand and a large force around him, amuses you with the name of peace, while he carries on the operations of war, what is left but to defend yourselves? . . . But if any man supposes this to be a peace, which will enable Philip to master all else and attack you last, he is a madman, or he talks of a peace observed towards him by you, not towards you by him.*

And further on—

> *If we really wait until he avows that he is at war with us, we are the simplest of mortals: for he would not declare that, though he marched even against Attica and Piraeus, at least if we may judge from his conduct to others. For example, to the Olynthians he declared, when he was forty furlongs from their city, that there was no alternative, but either they must quit Olynthus or he Macedonia; though before that time, whenever he was accused of such an intent, he took it ill and sent ambassadors to justify himself. Again, he marched towards the Phocians as if they were allies, and there were Phocian envoys who accompanied his march . . . and lastly he told these wretched people of Oreus, that he had sent his soldiers out of good-will to visit them, as he heard they were in trouble and dissension, and it was the part of allies and true friends to lend asssistance on such occasions. People who would never have harmed him, though they might have adopted measures of defence, he chose to deceive rather than warn them of his attack; and think ye he would declare war against you before he began it, and that while you are willing to be deceived? Impossible. He would be the silliest of mankind, if, whilst you the injured parties make no complaint against him, but are accusing your own countrymen, he should terminate your intestine strife and jealousies, warn you to turn against him, and remove the pretexts of his hirelings for asserting, to amuse you, that he makes no war upon Athens.*[1]

With this vigour and in these tones the campaign of the *Philippics* was carried on for ten years, as much against Athenian sluggishness as against Philip of Macedonia.

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[1] Third Philippic: *The Orations of Demosthenes*, translated by John Warrington, Everyman edition, Dent, 1954, pp. 191–2.

Nothing discouraged Demosthenes, and he needed time to 'cure the Athenians' ears'.

Here is a passage which shows even more clearly the civic apathy into which Athens had fallen, and Demosthenes' desperate desire to wake them from this mortal sleep into which they were sinking, they and the whole people of free Greece.

> *Does he not expressly write in his epistles, 'I am at peace with those who are willing to obey me'?*

(Do we not recognize the style of Hitler?)

> *. . . And we, the Greek community, seeing and hearing this, instead of sending embassies to one another about it and expressing indignation, are in such a miserable state, so intrenched in our separate towns, that to this day we can attempt nothing that interest or necessity requires; we cannot combine, or form any association for succour and alliance; we look unconcernedly on the man's growing power, each resolving (methinks) to enjoy the interval that another is destroyed in [Like Europe in 1940.], not caring or striving for the salvation of Greece: for none can be ignorant that Philip, like some course or attack of fever or other disease, is coming even on those that yet seem very far removed. . . .*
>
> *What is wanting to make his insolence complete? Besides his destruction of Grecian cities, does he not hold the Pythian games, the common festival of Greece, and, if he comes not himself, send his vassals to preside? . . . Does he not write to the Thessalians what form of government to adopt? send mercenaries to Porthmus, to expel the Eretrian commonalty; others to Oreus, to set up Philistides as ruler? Yet the Greeks endure to see all this; methinks they view it as they would a hailstorm, each praying that it may not fall on himself, none trying to prevent it.*[1]

In another speech, but still in 341, Demosthenes states plainly the real reasons why Philip's authoritarian imperialism is the enemy of the ideal Athens he is defending—the Athens of democracy and the independence of the cities.

> *There is nothing which he strives and plots against so much as our constitution, nothing in the world that he is so anxious about, as its destruction. And thereunto he is driven in some sort by necessity. . . . He is assured that, though he became the master of everything else, nothing can be safe for him while you are under popular government: should any reverse ever befall him (and many may happen to a man), all who are now under constraint will come for refuge to you. For you are not inclined yourselves to encroach and usurp dominion; but famous rather for checking the usurper of depriving*

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 195–7.

him of his conquests, ever ready to molest the aspirants for empire, and vindicate the liberty of all nations. He would not like that a free spirit should proceed from Athens, to watch the occasions of his weakness; nor is such reasoning foolish or idle. First then you must assume that he is an irreconcileable enemy of our constitution and democracy; secondly, you must be convinced that all his operations and contrivances are designed for the injury of our state.[1]

These are the two opponents in the great struggle at this turning-point in the fourth century. On one side, Philip and Macedonian imperialism—and also the monarchic ideal which was growing stronger and stronger on the borders of the Hellenic world—in Greek Sicily with Dionysius the Elder and Dionysius the Younger, in Thessaly with Jason of Pherae, no less than in Macedonia with Philip. And on the other side? Demosthenes alone, or almost alone, seeing himself (with few illusions, but unshakable constancy) as the defender of the first democratic city in Greece and, with her, of all the Greek cities that had remained true to that model of Hellenic political life, the City. The City, community of free and equal citizens; a sovereign community, jealous before all else of its national independence. For Demosthenes the democratic form of the city was the most characteristic expression of Greek civilization itself; and as such he defended it with unflagging energy against every other form of government, and specially against imperialistic monarchy, which is the lot of Barbarians. He was convinced that the war between Philip and Athens was war to the death: for the principles of the combatants were irreconcilable. He has proclaimed more clearly than any man of his time that Athenian democracy was the last bulwark Greece could find against Macedonian domination, and against all imperialism of whatever kind.

And yet this picture of the Athens-Philip conflict, black-and-white as Demosthenes wished it to be seen, is not an exact picture. For in fact Athens had already ceased to be that democratic city Demosthenes wanted her to be: the 'Republic of the Athenians' had already gone to join the dead; there was no longer a city in Athens, because there was no longer a civic spirit. That, too, Demosthenes knew and said in every form of words. It enraged him that in the Macedonian peril the people, the free citizens, would no longer take arms and fight themselves, but expected the State to use the resources of the reconstituted Athenian Empire to buy mercenaries who would defend their privileges for them. Not that they asked their new 'masters' for much—not even to be allowed to exercise their political rights, for they had sold them for a mess of pottage, 'panem et circenses'. All through his career Demosthenes consistently called for the fund used to buy theatre seats for the citizens to be diverted to military expenses, at least in time of war. He asked this from the people itself, pressingly and not unskilfully: his demands were never seriously met. But the worst thing in his eyes was the fact that the people no longer cared about determining the city's policy, and would rather leave that anxiety to the 'masters' it had accepted. These masters were its flatterers, for public opinion, while demanding liberty of speech in ordinary life, was only accepting it in the assembly in favour of those who flatter the mob.

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[1] Fourth Philippic, *ibid.*, p. 209.

The people of Athens, then, had already chosen slavery. Demosthenes, with the courage of despair, says as much—listen, and hear the bitterness of his tone.

> *How is it that all went prosperously then, and now goes wrong? Because anciently the people, having the courage to be soldiers, controlled the statesmen, and disposed of all emoluments; any of the rest was happy to receive from the people his share of honour, office, or advantage. Now, contrariwise, the statesmen dispose of emoluments; through them everything is done; you the people, enervated, stripped of treasure and allies, are become as underlings and hangers-on, happy if these persons dole you out show-money or send you paltry beeves; and, the unmanliest part of all, you are grateful for receiving your own. They, cooping you in the city, lead you to your pleasures, and make you tame and submissive to their hands. It is impossible, I say, to have a high and noble spirit, while you are engaged in petty and mean employments: whatever be the pursuits of men, their characters must be similar. By Ceres, I should not wonder, if I, for mentioning these things, suffered more from your resentment than the men who have brought them to pass. For even liberty of speech you allow not on all subjects; I marvel indeed you have allowed it here.*[1]

Demosthenes knew that his people was ripe for servitude; but he struggled on, against the devices of the Fifth Column in Athens, against Aeschines in particular, and traitors of every shape and form who had learned to win the confidence of the assembly—struggled desperately, to the end. He would not allow his people 'to find safety in slavery'.

Here is one last passage, indicating the cause of all the evils of the times—the corruption of the orators.

> *Still under these indignities we are all slack and disheartened, and look towards our neighbours, distrusting one another, instead of the common enemy. . . . But what has caused the mischief? There must be some cause, some good reason, why the Greeks were so eager for liberty then, and now are eager for servitude. There was something, men of Athens, something in the hearts of the multitude then, which there is not now, which overcame the wealth of Persia and maintained the freedom of Greece, and*

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[1] Third Olynthiac, trans. cited, pp. 140–1.

quailed not under any battle by land or sea; the loss whereof has ruined all, and thrown the affairs of Greece into confusion. What was this? Nothing subtle or clever: simply that whoever took money from the aspirants for power or the corrupters of Greece were universally detested: it was dreadful to be convicted of bribery; the severest punishment was inflicted on the guilty, and there was no intercession or pardon. The favourable moments for enterprise, which fortune frequently offers to the careless against the vigilant, to them that will do nothing against those that discharge all their duty, could not be bought from orators or generals; no more could mutual concord, nor distrust of tyrants and barbarians, nor anything of the kind. But now all such principles have been sold as in open market, and those imported in exchange, by which Greece is ruined and diseased. What are they? Envy where a man gets a bribe; laughter if he confesses it; mercy to the convicted; hatred of those that denounce the crime: all the usual attendants upon corruption. For as to ships and men and revenues and abundance of other materials, all that may be reckoned as constituting national strength—assuredly the Greeks of our day are more fully and perfectly supplied with such advantages than Greeks of the olden time. But they are all rendered useless, unavailable, unprofitable, by the agency of these traffickers.[1]

So the die was cast, through the fault of traitors, before the disaster of Chaeronea.

Philip had resolved to press for a decision. He seized the first pretext to hand for passing through Thermopylae, dropped the pretext once in Greece, and suddenly made for Athens. Athens was at first stupefied at the news. Great fires were lit to bring the countryfolk of Attica to the assembly. In the midst of the silent populace Demosthenes climbed to the speakers' tribune, and roused his hearers' courage by proposing that they march against Philip and also try, in this hour of supreme danger, to make an alliance with their old enemy, Thebes. The citizens listened to him, and rushed to arms. Demosthenes was sent as delegate to Thebes, where he found Philip's representatives already there, offering a share of the booty to the Thebans if they let the Macedonian army cross their territory to invade Attica. His eloquence reversed the situation and persuaded the Thebans to ally themselves with Athens; and the forces of the two cities now reconciled succeeded for a short time in stemming the advance of Philip.

The decisive clash took place on the first of September 338 B.C., at Chaeronea. The pick of the Greek troops was wiped out by the Macedonian cavalry under the command of Philip's son Alexander, aged eighteen. Three thousand Athenians were killed or taken prisoner; and the independance of the cities was ended.

Demosthenes, despite his forty-eight years, had enrolled as a private soldier.

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[1] Third Philippic, *ibid.*, pp. 197–8.

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The eloquence of Demosthenes, his immense efforts, so much courage and so much genius, do not suffice to hide from sight the collapse of the city of Athens.

Athens, as we know, had come out of the Peloponnesian war grievously injured, and had been in decline since the beginning of the fourth century. The other cities were following the same downward curve; though Sparta, and later Thebes, took advantage of Athenian decadence to clamber into a drab pre-eminence. Continual wars, and the uniting of all the rest against the city which in its turn made a bid for hegemony, led to only one result—general anarchy of the Greek world amid universal poverty, first of states and soon after of individuals. Here and there leagues, confederacies of cities were set up; but none of these political forms marked any advance on the conception of the city-state as it had existed, free and governed through long years of prosperity by the will of the majority of its citizens.

Only authoritarian monarchy, which now was coming into prominence, seemed to be gaining ground steadily. Numerous writers set before their readers the figure of the 'good monarch'; in this first half of the fourth century, they seemed to be preparing public opinion for the upheavals which were to turn Greece, and the countries invaded by the influence of Hellenism, into so many states ruled by monarchs. For the matter of that, what there was 'good' about these rulers—the Ptolemies and Seleucidae of the following century—is something that is certainly not apparent.

Should we blame Demosthenes for being mistaken over the future trend of his people's history? Some moderns have done so: but not his contemporaries, nor the Greeks of the end of the ancient era. According to the ancients, Demosthenes pursued 'the best policy possible'. Better in any case than that of his contemporary Eubulus, the able manager of the Athenian finances, the banker whose policy consisted of nothing but the liquidation of a bankruptcy of which he implicitly accepted the existence. Better than that of the popular orator Demades, who used to say, 'Athens is no more the city that fought at sea under our forefathers, but a slippered crone sipping an infusion of herbs.' Better than that of Aeschines, the convicted traitor, the show-off blinded with his own vanity, partisan of the policy of collaboration, of the 'dead dog floating with the stream'. And better than that of the general Phocion, honest man and defeatist, who saw the moral weakness of his fellow-citizens and did nothing to reform it, contenting himself with grumbling protests to relieve his conscience. Which this Colonel Blimp[1] did so well that he ended by accepting power under the occupying forces.

[1] Ce maître Ronchonnot.

We may note that all these men, as much responsible as Demosthenes for the 'trend' of future history, took their stand like him on the narrow, exclusive platform of the city.

Only one man perhaps, the rhetoric-teacher Isocrates, took a wider view. A considerable part of Isocrates' brilliant literary activity consisted in seeking, in the vicinity of the Greek world, for a ruler who could bring about the unity of Greece by employing Greek arms to conquer the Persian power. In the end he found his man—Philip of Macedonia. At the same time as Demosthenes was opening the campaign of the *Philippics*, Isocrates sent the king an open letter (his *Letter to Philip*[1]), asking him to reconcile the Greeks without looking for any reward other than that of subduing the Barbarians with their aid. Isocrates writes:

> *It is incumbent upon you to work for the good of the Hellenes, to reign as king over the Macedonians, and to extend your power over the greatest possible number of the barbarians.*[2]

The words sound well, but, alas, they are only words. Nor did Isocrates ever attempt an active political career: he was too afraid of his health, and managed, by sparing it, to live till ninety. He is said to have starved himself to death after Chaeronea—a vain atonement, if such it can be called.

Demosthenes survived the wreck of his hopes. Driven into exile, he carried on the struggle, fighting Philip, then Alexander and Antipater. Back in Athens, he fomented fresh revolts. His policy, in fact, never varied: it was shaped by fundamental moral values. Against every form of foreign domination Athens must uphold the democratic form of the City—characteristic in his eyes of Greek civilization in its fundamental humanism. Honour bade the Athenians, and the Greeks whose guides they were, to fight for liberty and democracy. Moreover, he believed their interest was at one with their honour and with the common interest of Greece.

This was the task to which he called Athens; but Athens would not hear him.

The loyal Roman citizen Plutarch, ill equipped as he was to comprehend the fifth-century democracy that Demosthenes was attempting to revive, gives this verdict on him:

> *It is apparent that after he had at the outset adopted a party and a line of policy in the conduct of the city's affairs, he maintained this to the end, and not only did not*

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[1] The reference seems to be to the composition usually called the 'Address to Philip', from which the quotation below is taken.

[2] *Isocrates*, translated by George Norlin, Loeb Classical Library, 1928, Vol. I, p. 337.

change his position while he lived but actually gave up his life that he might not change it.[1]

It was for that, for Athenian democracy which was already dead, that Demosthenes chose to die. He preferred suicide to life in servitude—that is, if such a man and such a genius can ever die. Demosthenes is still, for our contemporaries, an object of passionate love or hate, a sign of contention: not simply a teacher of eloquence, but a teacher of liberty. Historians call him now a hero, now an agent of Persia, now a simple lawyer, sometimes even a saint. Extolled and vilified, he is still alive.

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[1] *Lives*, translated by Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library, 1919, Vol. VII, p. 31.

CHAPTER SIX

THE GRAND POLITICAL DESIGN OF PLATO

Up to Plato, Greek literature is mainly poetry; the poet, to the men of the fifth century, is the educator of youth, the educator of the city. With Plato and after him, Greek literature becomes above all wisdom, knowledge, philosophy. The philosopher, the savant, not the poet, is the educator of individuals and cities; men turn away from Homer and the Greek tradition that flows from him. 'My dear Homer', says a character in the *Republic*, 'has any city been better ruled thanks to you? Have any men been made better?' Hence Plato's famous condemnation of poetry, beginning with Homer. The poets, those forgers of lies, are banished from the city.

Yet Plato, on the frontier between an age of poetry and an age of philosophy, is at one and the same time, from one end of his work to the other, both philosopher and poet. To that he owes his unrivalled charm; but the mixture is what makes it so difficult to interpret him. Ought we always to take Plato literally? When he jests, of whom is he making fun? Of us perhaps. And in his wonderful dialogues, which character speaks in his name? Is it always Socrates? Assuredly not: Sometimes it is Socrates' adversary—himself, Plato. In the last resort, is Plato's philosophy expressed more validly in dialectics or in myth? It depends. It has been said of Plato that he taught 'in parables'. The word gives us pause.

Plato was born in 427, which means that he had almost reached full manhood when, in 404, at the end of what is known as the Peloponnesian war, the city of Athens fell. He came of one of the noblest of Athenian families. His ancestors on his father's side were descended from the last king of Athens; one of his mother's forebears was Solon, the sixth-century precursor of democracy. The young aristocrat seemed called by his birth to play a part in public life. He received an education of the most complete type, that which the age believed suitable for sharpening the intellect and exercising the tongue in readiness for political life. A handsome, vigorous youth—his broad shoulders gave him the name of Plato, which is only a nickname. He won distinction as a soldier. Twice he was awarded an athlete's prize at national games. But the sophists and their debates drew him as strongly as the palaestra, and held him more firmly. He had heard in his youth, no doubt of it, the last lessons of the great sophists. His subtle mind enjoyed seeing thought hard pressed, and driven to turn against itself. He enjoyed hearing it said that men are born unequal, that ethics are only an invention of the weak to curb the stronger, and that of all forms of government aristocracy is the most reasonable. On more than one point, and notably in politics, the teachings of the sophists resembled and confirmed the anti-popular, Nietzschean remarks current in his immediate family circles, spoken by Critias, the future 'tyrant', his own mother's cousin.

He was easily affected, too, with a young man's enthusiasm, by the obsessive verbal spell that the sophists knew how to weave.

In his very early years however, while he frequented the palaestras and the sports grounds, he heard the master of that other magic, Socrates, expound his paradoxes and practise the art of 'refutation'. He saw his elders put to the question —his uncle Charmides, and the brilliant Critias, and the dashing Alcibiades, all forced to confess to the thoughts at the back of their minds, forced in the end to choose, and justify, the life they meant to lead. Socrates was their chance, perhaps their last chance. He was also the rare, the unique good fortune of Plato: snapped up, and at the same time rejected, he became Plato's vocation.

For the time being Plato was all attention, with the passionate attachment of his whole soul. He marked how the handsome Charmides, his young uncle, handsome as a naked athlete, drew by his beauty from Socrates himself an admiring exclamation, yet accompanied by a reservation—'If only one small thing were added!' 'What?' asks Critias. 'Beauty of soul,' replies Socrates. And this Charmides, so respected by Plato, with whom Plato would so dearly have loved to change places, was all at sea when Socrates asked him to define wisdom. So with Lysis when questioned on friendship, and Laches, the brave general Laches, called upon for a definition of courage—what an exhibition! As for the all-wise Hippias, that accomplished sophist, he proved not to know the first thing about the nature of beauty.

There remained Protagoras and Gorgias, those masters of rhetoric, of sophistic, of political theory, of the just and the unjust. In their turn they too were routed and turned away, disconcerted and confounded by the stinging irony of this old Marsyas of acrobatic speech.

Plato came too, but he was the first to come to Socrates in a spirit of entire confidence. He gave himself to the Socratic exercise of refutation—a splendid game! But was it a game? He put forward definitions on themes from public life.

He wished to reconcile the political traditions derived from his extremely aristocratic family with the usages of Athenian democracy (which he longed to reform), and with the most helpful memories and examples from the Tyrants. But for a long time—for eight whole years, from his twentieth year to the Master's death, from the Socratic conversations he attended and practised as a zealous disciple should, nothing remained with him but doubt, uncertainty, self-loathing, bitterness. What he would have liked was to be a just man governing a just city. But what was justice? Where in Athens was justice to be found?

A grand design began to mature within him. He must shape a new city.

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Parallel with the inward drama upon which he was entering, came the downfall of Athens, the incomprehensible tyranny dominated by his cousin Critias, then—sudden as a thunderbolt—the trial and death of Socrates.

The Athenians had lost their last fleet as early as 405—a hundred and sixty Athenian triremes captured in one manoeuvre, three or four thousand prisoners executed in cold blood.

> *'On that night no man slept,' says the historian who relates the event, 'There was mourning and sorrow for those that were lost, but lamentation for the dead was merged in even deeper sorrow for themselves.'*[1]

The two kings of Sparta already behaved as if at home in Attica. Pausanias was encamped at the gates of Athens in the gardens of Academus. Lysander was coming up with two hundred ships: he blockaded the Piraeus.

Struck to the heart, Athens capitulated. The fortifications and the Long Walls were razed, 'to the sound of the flute', says the aristocrat Xenophon. The Empire collapsed in a moment, the exiles were recalled. Men rejoiced 'deeming that day the beginning of liberty to Greece'. They were wrong—for Athens, assuredly, it marked the beginnings of slavery, Athens, forced to swear that it left 'the choice of friends and foes' to Sparta.[2]

That day, perhaps, Plato wept. But one hope tempered his grief: at last there was a strong government, that of the Thirty. The Thirty were Athenian citizens, for the most part returned from banishment; Critias was at their head; Charmides was a member of the government of the Piraeus. Plato's kinsmen and friends, he tells us in one of his letters, pressed him to take his place at their side. His comment is:

> *The feelings I then experienced, owing to my youth, were in no way surprising: for I*

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[1] *The Works of Xenophon*, translated by H. G. Dakyns, Macmillan, 1890, p. 44.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

imagined that they would administer the State by leading it out of an unjust way of life into a just way.[1]

But Plato did not consent to identify himself with his friends in the government of the Thirty. 'I watched carefully', he writes. He was waiting too, probably, to see what Socrates would do.

Now the Thirty, knowing the great influence that Socrates possessed over the Athenian populace and many young intellectuals, determined to associate him with their policy by an act of open complicity that would compromise him. They ordered him to go with four other citizens and arrest a certain Leon of Salamis, an honest man they proposed to put to death. Socrates did not move, though he risked the gravest consequences. Fifty years later Plato has not regained his composure as he tells the story. This affair estranged him, then, from his aristocratic friends, though it did nothing to bring him closer to the democratic faction, which he had long held to be rotten and had always hated.

This Plato of twenty-five, marked out for political life by his nature even more than by his family, but unable to enter it so long as violence and injustice openly prevailed; this Plato burning to act and forced to do nothing, who says himself that during the revolutions in Athens he was 'without friends or comrades who were true', was now to receive the hardest and most unexpected of blows. The master he had always loved and venerated, in spite of all his hidden misgivings, that Socrates whose conversations always outshone his expectations, was haled before a popular court by the authorities of the moment (the leaders of the democratic party, which was again in the ascendancy). The philosopher scarcely attempted to defend himself, he defied his judges, and seemed to want to die—as if his death would say more clearly than the life he had led, what he had to tell his people. So Socrates drank the hemlock. At the time Plato did not realize what a blow he had received; he seems to have been laid low by illness. From it he emerged a new man, as if from some bitter baptism.

For it was in the difficult years following the death of Socrates that some of the essential traits of Plato's genius became fixed. We need not even refer to his implacable denial of Athenian democracy, the régime that had killed his master; he had always despised and hated it. But now he felt the need to build up another city—and no dream city, no utopia, but a city of reason, the antipodes of democracy and its ravings, a city where such a crime would be simply inconceivable. To this project Plato devoted much of his life, continuing to the end—for he left the *Laws* unfinished at his death.

But another resolution, another endeavour, has its roots in these years of his greatest suffering. The Athens that had condemned Socrates was a world turned upside down; and this topsy-turveydom he meant to put right at last. What we in our blindness call reality, we must come to recognize as mere appearance; and what proclaims itself as invisible and escapes the discourse of our senses, that is what should be called the one, the pure reality. Plato's idealism bears the stamp of a deep trauma: the death of Socrates had dealt him a deadly wound. To cicatrize it, or simply to go on living, he must maintain that Socrates is not dead, must go on making Socrates speak. And what all his philosophy proclaims, no less than the literary form he gives to his fictions, is in the first instance this: that Socrates is alive—their two beings are indissolubly mingled to form a new being—and still continues to speak. A new Plato has found a new Socrates, who is the same thing as Justice—a Socrates who is the Just Man.

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[1] Plato, *Epistles*, translated by R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library, 1929, Vol. VII, p. 479.

This enabled Plato to bear witness to his master, first in a series of short dialogues which he began writing—those which are known as 'Socratic' because they are closer to this 'Socrates of history', though they remould Socrates in the likeness of an inner Socrates alive in Plato. He bears witness to him and rehabilitates him in the peerless *Apology of Socrates*, which he is bold enough to put into the mouth of his master, speaking before the tribunal. Finally, in the last and profoundest of the 'Socratic' dialogues, the *Gorgias*, Plato shows Socrates face to face with the sophists whom he at last unmasks, and with the seductive, Nietzschean figure of Callicles in whom we may discern so much of the younger Plato himself; and this Socrates becomes the picture of the perfectly just man, the just man who, under the conditions in which he is placed by a democracy which tampers with Justice itself, must consent to his own death.

In recovering his master, Plato had recovered too the hard path towards the political commitment he had so far refused to make. The same letter of his old age that sets out the irresolutions and confusions of his youth and how they ended, gives the precise formula from which all his future activity was to derive, whether philosophical or political.

> *I was compelled to declare that . . . the classes of mankind will have no cessation from evils until either the class of those who are right and true philosophers attains political supremacy, or else the class of those who hold power in the States becomes, by some dispensation of heaven, really philosophic.*[1]

The same alternatives are laid down for the salvation of cities in the *Republic*:

> *The society we have described can never grow into a reality or see the light of day, and there will be no end to the troubles of states, or indeed, my dear Glaucon, of*

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 483.

> *humanity itself, till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers, and political power and philosophy thus come into the same hands.*[1]

So that Plato did not evade his innate vocation, which was for the life of politics. The philosophy he was to build up, the metaphysics he was erecting like a lighthouse tower, were but preludes to the most important of his tasks, which was to lay down the policy of the city—not Athens, irremediably lost in the madness of democracy, but the city of the future in which philosophers will be kings.

What is this policy he wanted to carry out? In the *Gorgias*—a kind of challenge in the name of wisdom to the insanity of his native Athens—he had the answer and gave it with the utmost clarity. The right policy is simply to reform the citizens in the cities. Those who are responsible for it need seek no other aim, than to make the citizens juster and better. For to give them ships, arsenals, arms and ports—to give them empire, as Themistocles and Pericles had—is to distract them with futilities: worse still, it is to arm them for war, and prepare their downfall. To give them justice on the other hand is to armour them against misfortune; to give them virtue is to give them happiness, the only needful good, sought after by all. This is the truth that the philosopher must establish before he turns to action; it agrees with one of the famous Socratic paradoxes, that 'it is more blessed to suffer injustice than to commit it' (an Orphic as well as a Socratic saying).

Meanwhile Plato travelled for two years; he wanted to gather the political experiences and the scientific ideas of foreign peoples. In a short time he became one of the greatest scholars the world has known; and that no doubt is the reason why he began to teach only late in life. In 387 (at the age of forty) he settled in the Academy, where he founded his school for the training of true philosophers, those who were to become rulers of cities. There, in the walks of those gardens 'where the plane whispers with the elm', arose the Platonic fellowship, the Platonic partisan-group or conspiracy, a brotherhood in which, by study, dialectics, and the methodical exploring of fields of human thought and life still unreclaimed, eager and bold young spirits ensured a future for the civilization of Sophocles and Aristophanes, but an unexpected future—a speedy destruction and at the same time a flowering of unearthly splendour. The school of Plato, the first of the great 'schools' of late antiquity, was a mighty storehouse of energy—it manufactured explosives, but also it was already shaping the strangely different world which was to succeed its own—the world of Christianity.

During these years Plato himself was composing the *Republic*, and later the

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[1] *Republic*, translated by H. D. P. Lee, Penguin Classics, 1955, p. 233.

13. *Crocodile on the banks of the Nile*

Laws, two works which bear striking testimony to his unchangeable vocation for politics.

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He did not forget, either, the other road that remained open to him, according to the alternatives he had laid down (either philosophers would be kings or else, he said, kings would become philosophers).

Plato had always been drawn towards southern Italy and Sicily. There, being already convinced that virtue must be an infallible—in other words a mathematical—science, he had met Archytas of Tarentum, the founder of mechanics and acoustics, one of those philosophers known by a title carrying enormous prestige, that of 'Pythagoreans'. This Archytas held great but peaceable authority over the 'Pythagorean order' which had taken refuge at Tarentum—a savant's authority, free from all ambition where his community was concerned. Plato derived from contact with him a tone of ascetic enthusiasm, a new faith which breathes in the great dialogues of his middle life—*Gorgias*, the *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, and *Phaedrus*.

At Tarentum and elsewhere in Italy the philosopher also frequented the Orphic circles. The 'followers of Orpheus' were not mere tramps and beggars, squatting at temple doors with their stock of amulets and their repertoire of incantations. They were, however, above all, poor devils to whom life had brought little but poverty and hunger; Orphism was for them a refuge, with dreams of a promised after-life.

Plato, the wealthy aristocrat, remembered something of this escape-mystique of purely popular origin, when he essayed to proclaim his own gospel of the Beyond. In the Orphic truths he heard the strong magic of an incantation.

A land of rejuvenated Pythagoreanism and Orphism—that was how southern Italy appeared to Plato. Under this influence his Socratic outlook opens on to mystical horizons.

But other climates and other experiences awaited him in Sicily. Some time before, in Italy or elsewhere, he had formed bonds of friendship and common political ideas with a young man called Dion, a spirit of warm enthusiasm and something of a visionary. Dion was the brother-in-law of the new master of Syracuse, Dionysius I, a soldier of fortune turned despot, but by no means an 'enlightened despot', as Plato imagined on the report of Dion. In Dion Plato found a disciple of rare freshness and understanding: few figures—apart from Socrates of course—stand out more vividly than his in Plato's works. In the middle of the Syracusan court—a place of unrestrained pleasures and sensuality, Plato converted him to philosophy and asceticism, after which both, carried away by the heady enthusiasm of friendship, imagined that they would be able to win Dionysius to

14. *Marabou storks*

the philosophic life as well. We do not know by what steps Plato set about persuading him to rule his subjects according to philosophy; but it is certain that the monarch jibbed, and Plato one fine day found himself forcibly put on board a Lacedemonian ship which set him down in the isle of Aegina to be exposed for sale in the slave market. Some generous soul bought him and returned him to his friends and his philosophy; but when, later, he drew such a sinister picture of that most unhappy of men, the tyrant committing crime with impunity, he knew by experience how much a philosopher risked when he dared to approach such a man.

On two further occasions, under Dionysius II, Plato returned to his plans of reform in Syracuse with the help of Dion. But he seemed more and more convinced that the 'philosopher-tyrant' was non-existent. Nothing short of the decrepitude of Athenian institutions could have made him repeat his attempt in Sicily. This Athens was the city that Demosthenes was flogging with desperate persistence—at this date (367 and 361, Plato's last voyages to Sicily) not merely a detestable democracy but, in Plato's expression, an abominable, a grotesque 'theatrocracy'.

Voltaire did not win Frederick II to philosophy, nor Diderot the great Catherine. Plato failed likewise with the two tyrants of Syracuse.

As for Dion, he was assassinated. At the very moment when (in 354) he had achieved power in Syracuse and was preparing, as Plato says, to 'bring justice into being', he was basely murdered; and with him died his teacher's last hope of seeing on the throne a king who was 'a right and true philosopher'. Plato shed bitter tears at his young friend's violent death, which revolted him. He writes in the seventh of his *Epistles*,

> *I neither slur over the shamefulness and sinfulness of their action nor do I dwell on it.*[1]

This is the eulogy that he gives to Dion:

> *They . . . have done the greatest of injuries both to me, and, one may say, to all the rest of mankind— . . . by destroying the man who purposed to practise justice. . . . Resolved to suffer rather than to do unholy deeds—although guarding himself against so suffering—none the less when he had attained the highest pitch of superiority over his foes he stumbled. . . . While he most certainly did not fail to notice that those who brought him down were evil men, yet he did fail to realize to what a pitch of folly they had come, and of depravity also and voracious greed; and thereby he was brought down and lies fallen, enveloping Sicily in immeasurable woe.*[2]

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Let us halt for a few minutes at the *Republic*, which is an epoch in Plato's thought.

[1] *Epistles*, trans. cited, pp. 507–9.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 513, 563–5.

The title uses the word 'republic' in the sense of the Latin 'res publica', 'common weal'. The work is one of the richest left by Plato; and in it, truly, we find the whole of the man. We find of course, though not always in the forefront, the exposition of his political and social theories, including his feminism and what is called, quite inaccurately, his communism. But also his ideas on education, on the value of poetry and music, on the utility of the sciences. His definition of the philosophical spirit, and of the philosopher, is there. And above all the most essential parts of his metaphysics—nowhere is found more clearly than here the distinction between the several degrees of knowledge. We find, too, Plato's ideas on the after-life; also a rapid sketch of the history of human societies, from the origins of the social state to his own theory of political change: in particular a most searching and most caustic study of the two political systems most widely found in the Greek world and most hateful to Plato—democracy and tyranny. Democracy especially, against which the author looses shafts of ferocious sarcasm.

And all these themes, with others that I omit, are taken up, dropped and returned to in a dialogue (spread over ten books) which keeps the movement of a genuine conversation—a conversation in which anything can lead to anything else, because the speakers are all occupied with identical thoughts and led by the same love of justice and truth. At each turn of the dialogue, as in a drama, we agree with what each character says. Socrates, of course, the Socrates who still lives and moves in Plato, the Socrates who is Plato; also Plato's two brothers, Glaucon and Adimantus, not forgetting the fiery Thrasymachus, the sophist enamoured of pure violence.

The starting-point of Plato's enquiry—the search for the best form of government—lies in the conviction that Athenian democracy is an experiment that has failed. This he does not attempt to prove, nor does he seek for the causes of the failure. I have given them on an earlier page; all in all, the permanent existence of slavery is the principal cause. Plato did not accept that; so, refusing to take cognisance of the cause, he could not find the cure. His enquiry, vitiated from the start, still has immense interest from the great vigour of thought and imagination with which he throws himself into the attempt to remould the city anew, and re-educate the citizens—an attempt which turns in the last analysis into a bid for the salvation of souls. In certain ways we may say that this attempt has followed humanity through a long stage of its pilgrimage.

So Plato, in his own way, like Demosthenes and like Thucydides, confirms the historic failure of Athenian democracy. But Plato's work does not merely record this failure, it also marks a new starting-point for humanity. As I have shown for Euripides, in history there is no failure or ending that is not, or may not be, a beginning. The rest of this book will continue to demonstrate that truth.

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Let us come back to the *Republic* and the new-model city it sets forward. At times it seems to be a kind of inverted image of the democracy derived from Solon. Instead of being founded on equality between citizens and equality between their political rights in the assembly, it is founded on the inequality of their natural gifts—justly observed as far as theory is concerned—whence results the inequality between their ways of life and the callings allotted to them. (I shall not mention the inequality in political rights, seeing that for most of them they are non-existent.)

Plato's city contains three classes of people, three classes far from equal in number—without even considering the slaves, who are simply a reservoir of muscle or machinery. The existence of these three classes is clear enough proof that the democratic experiment has failed: it shows, too, the growth of the cancer of slavery, the contagious spread of the principle of segregation through new sectors of society, inasmuch as neither the worker class nor the soldier class have any share in the government.

At the very base of the edifice is the most numerous of the classes, the mass of workers—traders, but mostly craftsmen and peasants. These must work hard enough to provide for all the material needs of the entire community—food, clothing, housing. Plato, so occupied everywhere in his work with the problems of education, has no thought of giving any culture to the workers—their work is enough for them. The name of culture can hardly be given to what is put within their reach in the city festivals, when religion trains them in their duties towards the State; the chief of these duties is to labour in the station they occupy for the good of the community, with whatever gifts they have received from nature. Their peculiar virtue is to moderate their appetites and curb their passions: the lesson they have to learn is temperance.

Above them comes the warrior class, which Plato also calls the guardians. For their city needs not only to be clothed, fed and so forth, it needs to be defended. Plato loathes war as the worst of evils; but he distrusts also those apathetic characters who

> *because of this desire of theirs* [*for peace*] *which is often inopportune and excessive, when they have their own way . . . quite unconsciously become unwarlike; . . . they are at the mercy of aggressors.*

(This is from a passage in the *Statesman*[1].)

To the guardians' education Plato gives the utmost care. It is based on the practice of the ancient aristocratic disciplines, gymnastics and music. And by music we must understand all that pertains to the Muses, poetry, music properly speaking, and dancing. So by sport and the arts this warrior class is trained in courage and contempt for death, in that nobility of moral sentiment which in times past had filled the lyrical poetry of Sparta and Thebes.

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[1] Translated by Harold N. Fowler, Loeb Classical Library, 1925, Vol. III, p. 183.

But, as is well known, there is another poetry, which Plato denies to the citizens of his republic—the epic, that is, and tragic poetry as well. Tragedy, the glory of Athens in the age of Aeschylus and Sophocles, is harmful according to Plato in that it decks out the adventure of mankind with dangerous delights, and paints the passions with a complaisance that he holds to be culpable. The tragic poets, like Homer, are banished from the republic: art becomes moral, over-moral. Plato's valiant warriors will be kept in ignorance of evil; in this way he thinks to spare them the temptation of using the force they possess to seize political power. They are to have no other passion than love for the just cause.

A phrase of great attractiveness spares them yet other temptations 'All things are common between friends'—it was a Pythagorean expression (φιλότης ἰσότης). Plato deprives the class of guardians of the pleasure of property and the joys of family life. They possess neither lands nor wives of their own. Greed for property or family considerations might seduce them from the service of the city. Their marriages are temporary unions, arranged by the magistrates through drawing of lots (which are rigged, into the bargain). As for the children, they are taken from their mothers in infancy and reared at the expense of the State; they will never know their parents; they will call father and mother all those who are of the right age, and brothers and sisters all children born about the same time as themselves. In this way does Plato create and train the class of guardians, bringing many considerations of eugenics into the discussion, modelling himself on the practice of horse- and cattle-breeders, using and abusing comparisons with the animal world.

But, the point must be stressed, Plato is not solely influenced, and above all not here, by eugenic considerations—the improvement of the breed. He wants to cut out from the hearts of the servants of the State, the guardians, the two strongest roots of individual selfishness—love of property, love of family.

One does not think, at first, of looking in history for realizations of such inhuman dreams (what are we to think of an expression like 'taking every precaution to see that no mother recognises her child'?) Yet the Platonic fancy has actually been turned into reality, and precisely on this point. Not by communism in the U.S.S.R.: but by the Catholic Church, when, in order to devote the soldiers of the church entirely to the community, it imposed on the clergy the vow of poverty and the vow of chastity; expedients which are at least as contrary to nature as the community of goods and of wives, and which in any case work to the same end—that of dedicating the individual unreservedly, without the lure of money, and away from the temptations of women, to the community.

In the Middle Ages it was the rule to divide the population of Christendom, in accordance with social reality, into three classes: there were the *laboratores* (workers), the *bellatores* (soldiers, men of war), and the *oratores* (clergy). It was the clergy who wielded the reality of power, so this class was forced to renounce all family interests, by the institution of celibacy and the vow of poverty.

I have said nothing of the highest class—the very small minority of philosopher-magistrates. The rule of the philosophers must owe a great deal to Plato's experience of the Pythagoreans at Tarentum. They are scholarly officials who only enter on their functions after very protracted studies, beginning with geometry, where the reasoning powers are developed; they go on to every other known science, and to dialectics, which leads them to the study and contemplation of Ideas—those objective Entities, the Good, the Beautiful, the Just, which constitute the sole reality of Plato's philosophic universe.

It must be added that these masters of the State, these philosophers who are so sure of themselves, care not the slightest for what is so dear to us, individual liberty. The means matter little to them; only the end is worthy of consideration. Men will be put to death if need be, others will be banished: the philosopher is not obliged to convince each citizen of the rightness of each reform. It is enough that the reformer should be convinced himself. False reasons will be invented for popular consumption, since the people, like children, are not capable of receiving the truth. Fables will be told, and lies which, in this context, will be termed 'royal lies'. To such shifts, alas, the great Plato has descended.

I will not labour the point. For the present we have only to note that Plato believes that he can ensure justice in the city and salvation for men by the rule of philosophers over the rest of the citizens—which we might conceivably bring ourselves to accept if the philosophy in question and the knowledge that these philosophers had of the world were at all related to reality, if we had proof that it is objectively true. But this cannot possibly be granted. We are on the contrary forced to declare that the philosophy of Plato appears to us today as one of the gravest aberrations of the mind of man; more, it is an enterprise destined in time to give sustenance to a religion of consolation. In a word, an avowal of weakness.

To sum up Plato's grand political projects.—How was it possible to reach such a point, living in that Athenian democracy which only recently had seemed so flourishing? The ascending class, the active class of traders, craftsmen and peasants, which had opened the way to the rise of democracy a century before, in the first half of the fifth century, had halted its advance, as so often happens, at its first conquests. It had relied on the certainty that it could always exploit the slaves, whose numbers were ever increasing. When its resources, its markets and its own productivity had begun to run dry, Athens and the other mercantile cities had launched into imperialistic wars in which they ruined one another. Now they felt the need to obtain security and stability at any price, even in servitude, or even if, as in Plato's *Republic*, the certainty was pure imagination. The cities were already disposed (here Demosthenes confirms Plato) to renounce the last figments of democracy, and sell the last vestiges of liberty for security under some domination, that of Macedonia or that of the philosophers.

The Platonic city offered men, back in the fourth century, the deceptive appearance of a state in perfect equilibrium, where nothing could disturb the order set up for ever. That is one of the strangest aspects of the city Plato shows us—nothing in it will ever move. It is a state from which progress is sternly banished, a state perfect, by definition, for all eternity. As Plato sees it, in this equilibrium of absolute justice, what is called 'progress', or more simply change, could only be synonymous with decadence. For in a state where the philosophers have all knowledge and can never err, in such a state nothing can happen. Plato's aim would seem to have been to abolish history.

But man is not made for immovable paradises: history carries him forward—history makes man and man history. The ages of stability are an illusion. Many hundreds of years after Plato thought he had signed the death certificate of democracy in the pages of his *Republic*, the march towards democracy began again, in the middle of the static Christian Middle Ages, with the struggle of the free towns in Italy and France. Then comes 1789. . . . Then 1848. . . . Then the 'ten days that shook the world'. . . .

The history of humanity is only beginning.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PLATO: BEAUTY AND ILLUSION

There is another Plato—but he is the same—who, without ever forsaking his lifelong quest, or creation, of a new city, at one moment more visionary (as in the *Republic*), at another more reasonable (as in the *Laws*), begins to give a central position in his life to another set of questions—'What is the world in which we live? What meaning has the reality around us? What our eyes see and our ears hear, is that all that is real? Is it reality even, or only its appearance?'

Plato is a poet enamoured of the real, of what common sense calls the real—the world of the senses, of colours, shapes and sounds. All his life he was passionately in love with the wonderful physical world we live in: his work is striking proof of this. He loves sun, stars, sky, clouds in the wind and swaying trees, fields and rivers, water and the changing reflections in water. This natural world is for ever overflowing into his work and impregnating it—swans and cicadas sport in his myths; the shade of a tall plane, the coolness of a spring, the scent of the purple clusters of the agnus castus, provide a congenial obbligato to a conversation between Socrates and Phaedrus on the beauty of souls.

The slow dialogue of the twelve books of the *Laws*—the longest work he has written—runs on as the accompaniment of an unhurried journey leading three aged men from the city of Gnossus in Crete to the grotto of Idaean Zeus; on their way they halt in romantic groves of cypress to rest their weariness and indulge in talk, while their eyes travel far off to the waving grasses of wide meadows. So the scents of trees and fields never cease to attend this last progress, this last quest of Plato.

Especially he loves, as the masterpiece of physical nature, the finely-moulded beauty of the human form, the grace of promised unfolding in the youths as they train in the palaestra—provided, as Socrates adds, that the elegance of their bodies holds a soul eager to learn and tending to the good.

Plato's dialogues are full of characters and scenes from everyday life. This is centuries before the advent of the romance or novel, but Plato is there to supply all we need, and his love of people and things puts us in full possession of this enchanted world which our senses and ingenuous common sense call the real one.

More than this: after the philosopher has been led by his reason to deny the existence of this world of the senses, and reduced it to non-existence in spite of his passionate early love for it, he still takes care, in painting the only world that exists for him since his eyes have been enlightened—the world of ideal Forms, inaccessible to our gross senses—to clothe the nakedness of his Ideas with the hues and all the sensual appeal which he had rejected so absolutely.

The world of Platonic Ideas ends by acquiring, from the pen of this magician Plato, all the brightness of the poetic world of Aeschylus or Pindar.

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To lead us into it he invents this allegory.

Think of a cave of some depth, where men are chained in such a position that they can only see its far end. Behind them is a fire, and between the fire and the place where they sit, a wall. Men walk up and down on the other side of the wall, lifting above it images representing every form of life.

What do the prisoners see? As they cannot turn round, they can only see, cast on the back of the cave as on a screen, the moving shadows of the images.—These shadows represent all that exists in nature and all the sights that make up human life.—What do they hear? Only the echo, reflected from the back of the cave, of the words spoken by the men bearing the images, unseen behind the wall. What can they think? They have no suspicion of the existence of the images, still less of the things and the scenes they represent; so they take the shadows for reality itself, instead of the obscure reflection of an imitation of the real; and they deny the existence of everything else.

Now suppose that some one of these prisoners is freed from his chains and forced to rise, turn round, and look in the direction of the fire. He will not be able to make these movements without pain, because he has been motionless from birth. If he is now asked, while he is still dazzled by the glare of the fire, about the figures that are being shown, he will not be able to name them clearly, although a moment before he could see the shadows perfectly, and even guess the order in which they would probably appear on the screen.

But little by little the eyes of the liberated man grow used to the firelight: he realizes that the shadows, which seemed to him the whole of reality, are nothing, but simply the result of the fire and the figures put in front of it.

What if now he is forcibly dragged from his cave, and brought up 'by a rough steep path' into the sunlight? He will be blinded by the glare of the full day when he reaches it, and will not at first be able to make out any of the objects which are real things. Slowly however his eyes will grow used to the upper regions: he will discern first the images formed on the surface of the water, then the things themselves. If he looks up towards the light of the moon and the night sky, he will be able to gaze at the constellations during darkness before he can bear the sight of the sun in full day. At length, by practice, he will become able to see the sun in water or wherever it is reflected; then—the final step in knowledge—to gaze at the sun itself as it is in its own place in the heavens.

Now he sees real plants and real animals, he discovers the true sun that lights them and fosters their life. He can see all these vivid substantial realities of which the images and shadows in the cave were but the poor imitation and the pale reflection.

If now in the midst of his joy he recalls his earlier dwelling and thinks of his companions in captivity, the man will want to go back into the cave, sit in his former place and tell his old friends of his hard climb up into the light and the incredible beauties he has discovered. But who will believe him? He will be called an impostor. It may even be that, if they can get hold of him, the captives in the cave will put him to death. Was that not what happened to Socrates, Plato's beloved master?

So, very briefly summarized, runs the allegory in which Plato has expressed the knowledge he believes he has of the world and reality. How should we interpret it?

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All that the prisoners see in the cave, the images as well as their shadows, constitutes the world of the senses, which is a world of pure illusion. The shadows are the illusions of the senses, the images of dreams, to which the credulity of the vulgar is attached, as to the only truth. But the figures that move above the wall and represent objects accurately perceived—to which commonly we give the name of real—are equally nothing but illusions, imitations of that Reality which cannot be perceived with the eyes of the body but which science reveals to the philosopher, outside the cave.

For there do exist, in the allegory of the cave, things and beings that are real, of which the images are imitations and the shadows rough reproductions. To contemplate these real entities the prisoners must first climb out of the cave, that is to say their body—in other words, die. This breaking away from the sensible world is not to be achieved without effort or pain. The chains that bind us to it represent desires and fears, the passions that subject us to our bodies and imprison us in the realm of appearances. The 'hard rocky path' by which we can reach the true world is philosophical reflection, dialectical method. Our soul, or the higher part of our soul, the reason, rejects the evidence of our senses and, after long and difficult study, brings us to knowledge of the 'models'—the perfect forms after which are fashioned the imperfect objects we take for real.

These models Plato calls 'Ideas' or 'Essences'. The word Ideas in Plato's philosophy denotes, not the ideas of our own minds, but these perfect entities which exist objectively outside us—increate and imperishable, eternal and unchangeable, which the philosopher's soul may be permitted to contemplate in so far as it recognizes the vanity of the material world, the world of sensation, in so far also as it has been trained, step by step, in the method of dialectical knowledge. The soul contemplates and, so to speak, feeds upon the Ideas, in the same way as the blessed, after death, look on the Face of God in Paradise.

So nothing exists in fulness, except Ideas. If we chance to commit a just act, it is because there exists a pure Form of Justice which, to a point, our minds have been able to contemplate. If we see, or create, a beautiful object, it is because our soul has conceived—not by means of eyes or hands, but by reason alone—the pure Form of Beauty.

So is it, not only with just acts and beautiful objects, but with everything that has being in the world. Things are perceived by us, through the illusions and errors of our senses, only because we find in the deformation a reminiscence of the pure Idea, the Essence which they imitate.

You may think you see, or draw, a right-angled triangle, but no hand, no pencil can draw one—geometrical figures are ideal forms in which the lines have no thickness. A right-angled triangle is not large, nor small, nor this, nor that, nor anything—except right-angled. The draughtsman may think he draws hundreds of right-angled triangles: but only one exists, raised high above the particular appearances that he draws—the pure eternal Idea of the Right-angled Triangle *en soi*.

Out walking in the country, you may think you come across herds of horses. You are wrong. All that you have seen, in so far as your deceptive sensations allowed, is appearances which emerge from non-existence in virtue of their *participation* in the Form of Horse. For the Model, the Idea of Horse, is not black or white or bay or piebald, it is of no equine breed. It is pure Horse, and your senses will never reveal it to you. Your mind alone, beyond sensation, may contemplate it. And so for the rest.

Plato's philosophy is idealist philosophy, not in the present-day sense of the word, but because it is the philosophy of the objective existence of Ideas—those eternal Essences of which our soul alone takes cognizance—or rather, which it re-cognizes; for it lived in the presence of these celestial entities, before it fell into what Plato calls the tomb of the soul (as the Pythagoreans also called it before him), which is our blind and perishable body.

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I hope the reader begins to form some conception of the strangeness of this philosophy of Plato's, and what a turning-point it was in ancient civilization. For Plato there is on the one hand the sensible world, the world of matter, sunk in non-existence; on the other the world known directly to the soul by thought, the world of ideal Forms, which is the sole Reality.

As a matter of fact the soul, become half blind, deaf and dumb in the opacity of the body, doomed to darkness in the illusory world of the senses, would not know Ideas if it did not *recognize* them—if it had never gazed on them before its corporeal, terrestrial incarnation.

In another mythical narrative, the complement of that of the cave, Plato shows us the soul roaming through the regions of the heavens before its imprisonment in the body. Here the soul is represented by a team of two winged horses—one white, athirst for glory, virtue and truth, and standing for our noble passions, our instinctive struggle towards the beautiful and the good; the other, clumsy, crooked, black, with short neck, bloodshot eyes and hairy nostrils, loving violence and with difficulty mastered by the curb, which is our lower passions, those which draw us into injustice. The driver of the symbolic pair is our reason, the highest part of our soul, whose task it is to drive the two winged beasts in double harness, following the path of some god, until they arrive on high in the upper regions of the sky. The procession of souls flies up, then, towards the heights, where in the absolute dwell the eternal Ideas, pure Beauty and pure Justice. Here is a short passage from this myth.

> *When they go to a feast and a banquet, they proceed steeply upward to the top of the vault of heaven, where the chariots of the gods, whose well matched horses obey the rein, advance easily, but the others with difficulty; for the horse of evil nature weighs the chariot down, making it heavy and pulling toward the earth the charioteer whose horse is not well trained. There the utmost toil and struggle await the soul. For those that are called immortal, when they reach the top, pass outside and take their place on the outer surface of the heaven, and when they have taken their stand, the revolution carries them round and they behold the things outside of the heaven.*[1]

But the struggle is too hard for most human souls, and most of them catch only a moment's glimpse of the genuine Truth, Wisdom and Beauty. Then they fall, and in their fall lose their wings; thereafter on earth the soul is enclosed in a human body. Yet sometimes in this tomb it may recall what it has seen, and begin to grow wings for another flight to heaven. The account goes on:

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[1] *Phaedrus*, translated by Harold N. Fowler, Loeb Classical Library, 1914, Vol. I, p. 475.

> *The fourth kind of madness . . . causes him to be regarded as mad, who, when he sees the beauty on earth, remembering the true beauty, feels his wings growing and longs to stretch them for an upward flight, but cannot do so, and, like a bird, gazes upward and neglects the things below. . . . This is, of all inspirations, the best and of the highest origin. . . . Every soul of man has by the law of nature beheld the realities, otherwise it would not have entered into a human being, but it is not easy for all souls to gain from earthly things a recollection of those realities, either for those which had but a brief view of them at that earlier time, or for those which, after falling to earth, were so unfortunate as to be turned towards unrighteousness through some evil communications and to have forgotten the holy sights they once saw. Few then are left which retain an adequate recollection of them; but these when they see here any likeness of the things of the other world, are stricken with amazement and can no longer control themselves; but they do not understand their condition, because they do not clearly perceive. Now in the earthly copies of justice and temperance and the other ideas which are precious to souls there is no light, but only a few, approaching the images through the darkling organs of sense, behold in them the nature of that which they imitate, and these few do this with difficulty. But at that former time they saw beauty shining in brightness, when, with a blessed company—we [the philosophers] following in the train of Zeus, and others in that of some other god—they saw the blessed sight and vision and were initiated into that which is rightly called the most blessed of mysteries, which we celebrated in a state of perfection, when we were without experience of the evils which awaited us in the time to come, being permitted as initiates to the sight of the perfect and simple and calm and happy apparitions, which we saw in the pure light, being ourselves pure and not entombed in this which we carry about with us and call the body, in which we are imprisoned like an oyster in its shell.*[1]

Need I dwell longer on what I have called the Platonic turning-point in the ancient world? This myth of the soul's fall from heaven, these recurring images in which the body is shown as the tomb or the prison of the soul, this rigid distinction laid down between the two—are these not to become the ideological substructure of the Christian faith?

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Here we lay our fingers on what was profoundly new in the picture of the world elaborated by Plato in Greece nearly four centuries before the beginning of our era. Until then, ancient life had not been turned towards death and the Beyond: it was absorbed by the production and acquisition of earthly goods, and nourished by the joy of living out our brief human span on earth as bravely, as justly, and if need be as heroically as possible. On the other side of death the Greeks mostly saw only a diminished form of existence, and that, for many of them, was doubtful. Think of Achilles—he lives his man's life to the full, spends it lavishly, prodigally in the turmoil of the passions: for the day of his death he never spares a thought—death is the price agreed on for the only immortality that counts for him—his fame. And meanwhile, no more than a shade among the 'helpless ghosts,' his soul has gone down to the Underworld. Odysseus finds him there when he ventures into those regions, and questions him on the kingly state that is accorded him in the meagre paradise of the Elysian Fields. With suddenly regained energy Achilles replies:

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 483–4.

> *I would rather be a serf in the house of some landless man, with little enough for himself to live on, than king of all these dead men that have done with life.*[1]

There speaks Greek antiquity, in its fundamental humanism: it declares the prime, the unique value of our present earthly life, in comparison with the bleak consolations of the Beyond.

With Plato, all that changes. The soul has lived before the body, and will go on living after it—once it has traversed several earthly existences virtuously. In truth, death must be passed through more than once; more than once it must deliver the wise man from the constraints of life in the flesh. 'To philosophize' declares Socrates (already dead, but living on in Plato), 'to philosophize is to learn how to die.' And while he talks to his disciples from whom death will come to separate him—from whom it does separate him for his own fulfiment—we can feel the ancient conception of existence change its axis. Our present life lived in joy and pain, courage and weakness, wisdom and ignorance, our fleeting present life, is no longer what so many poets and sages had declared it to be, our dearest possession and the only certain centre of our being. The one limited life on earth in the flesh, precious, irreplaceable, is not the true life, says Plato—only a prelude to it, a schooling perhaps, a question asked of death. This is asserted with force by the new resurrected Socrates, who lives in Plato and is Plato—Plato the future of Socrates—; life on earth is indeed only an 'apprenticeship for death'. Man's deepest hope and his surest grounds for living are now in the after-life.

So the immortality of the soul overshadows and folds in our mortal life. That was why the disciples of Socrates, as he drank the hemlock in prison, read on his face perfect serenity, 'a wonderful calm'. Death, he explains with composure, seems to be:

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[1] *Odyssey* XI, translated by E. V. Rieu, Penguin Classics, 1945, p. 184.

> *. . . A bypath leading to the right track. So long as we keep to the body and our soul is contaminated with this imperfection, there is no chance of our ever attaining satisfactorily to our object, which we assert to be Truth. In the first place, the body provides us with innumerable distractions in the pursuit of our necessary sustenance; and any diseases which attack us hinder our quest for reality. Besides, the body fills us with loves and desires and fears and all sorts of fancies and a great deal of nonsense, with the result that we literally never get an opportunity to think at all about anything. Wars and revolutions and battles are due simply and solely to the body and its desires. All wars are undertaken for the acquisition of wealth; and the reason why we have to acquire wealth is the body, because we are slaves in its service. That is why, on all these accounts, we have so little time for philosophy. Worst of all, if we do obtain any leisure from the body's claims and turn to some line of inquiry, the body intrudes once more into our investigations, interrupting, disturbing, distracting, and preventing us from getting a glimpse of the truth. We are in fact convinced that if we are ever to have pure knowledge of anything, we must get rid of the body and contemplate things by themselves with the soul by itself. It seems, to judge from the argument, that the wisdom which we desire and upon which we profess to have set our hearts will be attainable only when we are dead, and not in our lifetime. If no pure knowledge is possible in the company of the body, then either it is totally impossible to acquire knowledge, or it is only possible after death, because it is only then that the soul will be separate and independent of the body. It seems that so long as we are alive, we shall continue closest to knowledge if we avoid as much as we can all contact and association with the body, except when they are absolutely necessary; and instead of allowing ourselves to become infected with its nature, purify ourselves from it until God himself gives us deliverance. In this way, by keeping ourselves uncontaminated by the follies of the body, we shall probably reach the company of others like ourselves and gain direct knowledge of all that is pure and uncontaminated—that is, presumably, of Truth.*[1]

'Uncontaminated by the follies of the body!' And, earlier in the speech, 'this imperfection', this 'infection', this 'impurity'! there indeed, in this page so full of invectives against the body, of scorn for the body and the life of the senses, there indeed we hear a voice which is new in a Greek writer.

But here once again we see the ambivalence of the conception of decline. What would Homer have thought, not to mention Pindar or Aristophanes, of this body pictured as an obstacle to the full flowering of our being—this body degraded (as the comic poet seemed to foretell) until in the 'thinking-shop' it is nothing more than the grimacing pretext for a soul filled to bursting with wisdom? Yet, at the same time as a passage like this leads us far away from the true classical Hellas, we are borne forward on the path of a new Hellenic spirit—on paths which will later bear another name. 'Uncontaminated by the follies of the body we shall . . . gain direct knowledge of all that is pure'—is this not a foretaste of 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'?

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[1] *Phaedo*, from Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*, translated by Hugh Tredennick, Penguin Classics, 1954, pp. 85–6.

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The passage quoted above comes from the *Phaedo*, the dialogue in which Plato sets out to *demonstrate* the immortality of the soul (that same *Phaedo* which in the days of the Italian Renaissance Cosimo de' Medici and, I fancy, Cardinal Orsini had read to them on their deathbeds to prepare them for the last struggle). Demonstration, rhetoric and poetry—nothing specifically Greek is wanting in the work, which comes from one who is at the same time a logician, almost a geometrician, a master orator and a magician of language.

But does *Phaedo* convince us? I have personally known only one man, a learned Greek scholar, who declared himself rationally won over by Plato's arguments. But in fact do we yield to the unanswerable logic, or do we let our hearts assent to Socrates' dying speech? The dialogue touches more than it convinces us. What does convince us—more than the arguments put forward—is the complete good faith of those taking part in the conversation. The doubts the other speakers still feel, but hesitate to express at a moment when the immortality of his soul is the only possession that their Master still holds in his hand; these doubts which nevertheless they express, out of respect for truth, are more convincing in their brave honesty than the arguments with which Socrates refutes them. But the most convincing thing of all—if a man must absolutely be convinced of this immortality which seems to elude us a little more at each turn of the discussion—is that Socrates himself gives it up, or very nearly, at the very moment when all his adversaries are silenced. For Socrates at the end refuses to give full credence to the visions he has been painting of the eternal abode of souls, and, with modesty in face of the mystery he has gazed at too long, refuses to give the name of reasoned certainty to the enchanting description of the soul's felicity which he has painted. He is content now to put it forward as an act of faith, a great hope. 'This', he says, 'is . . . a belief worth risking; for the risk is a noble one. We should use such accounts to inspire ourselves with confidence.'[1]

From his Greek background, Plato has advanced this far, and reaches this conception of a 'gamble'.[2] But consider once more the conditions to be fulfilled—Socrates continues:

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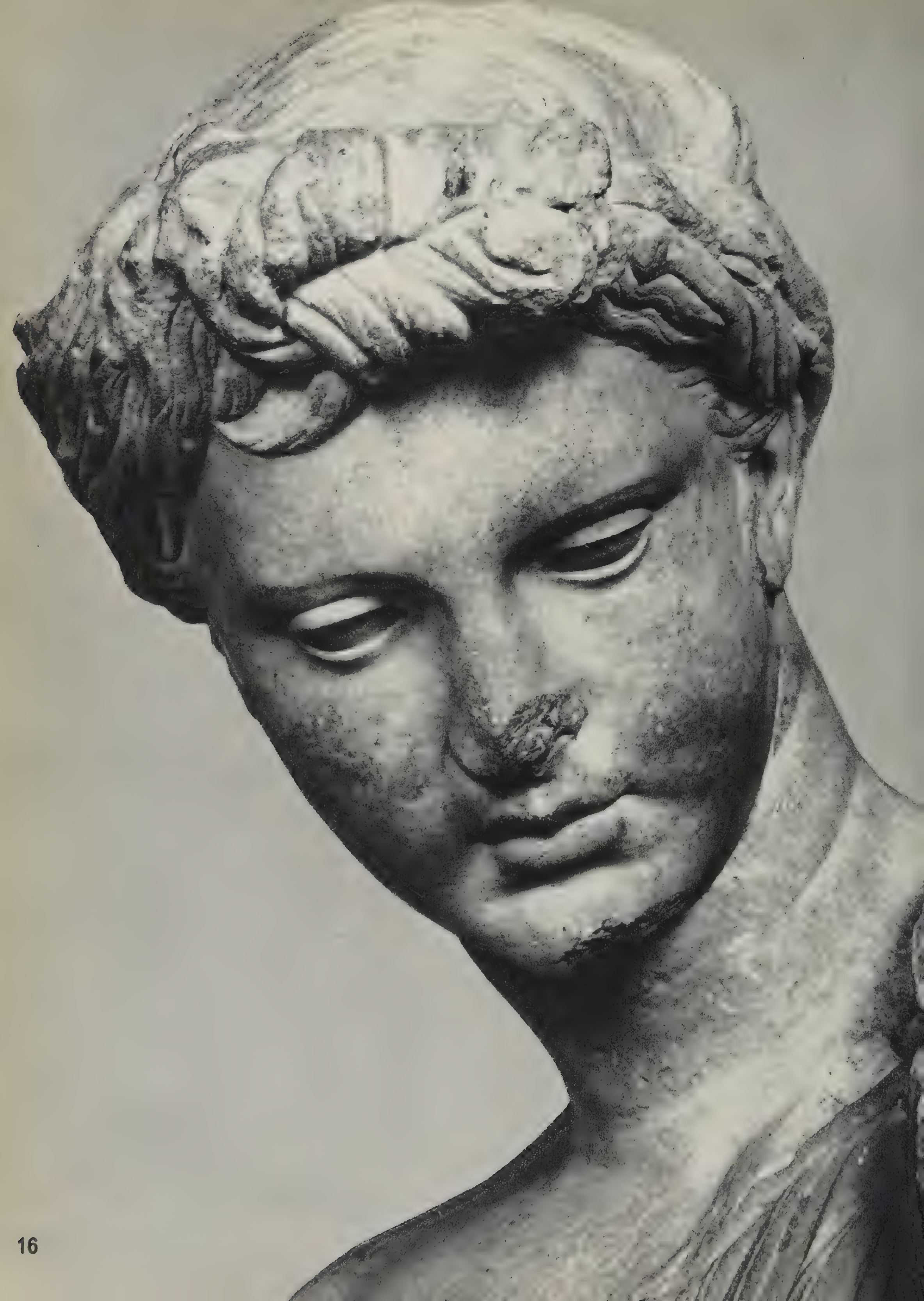
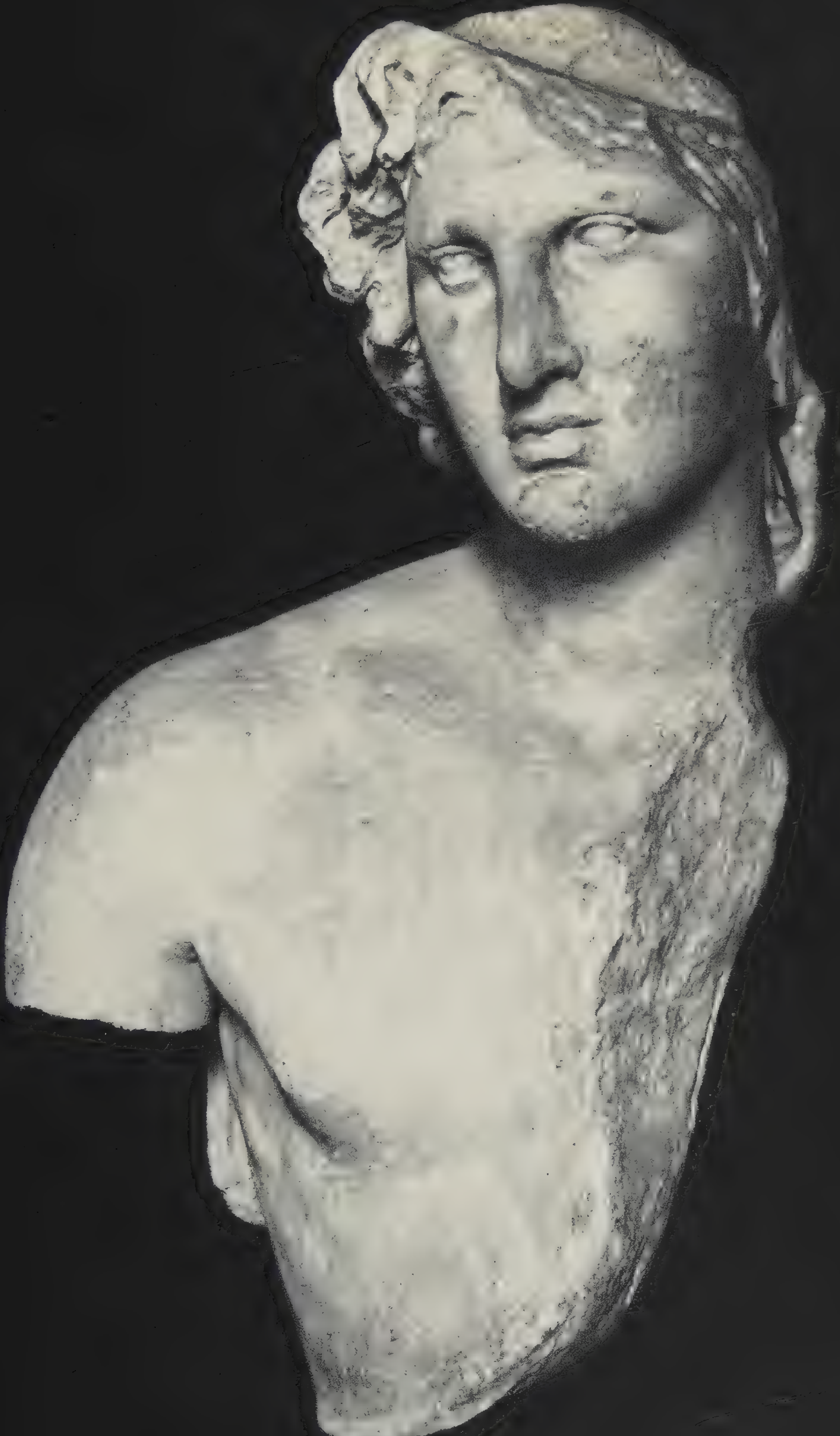
[1] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

[2] The allusion is to Pascal's 'wager'. ' "Dieu est, ou il n'est pas." Mais de quel côté pencherons-nous? La raison n'y peut rien déterminer. . . . Il faut parier,' etc. (*Pensées*, § 233)—Translator.

15. *Egyptian birds*
16. (Overleaf, left) *Girl of Antium (Hellenistic period) Rome, National Museum*
17. (Overleaf, right) *Alexander the Great. Paris, Louvre Museum*

15





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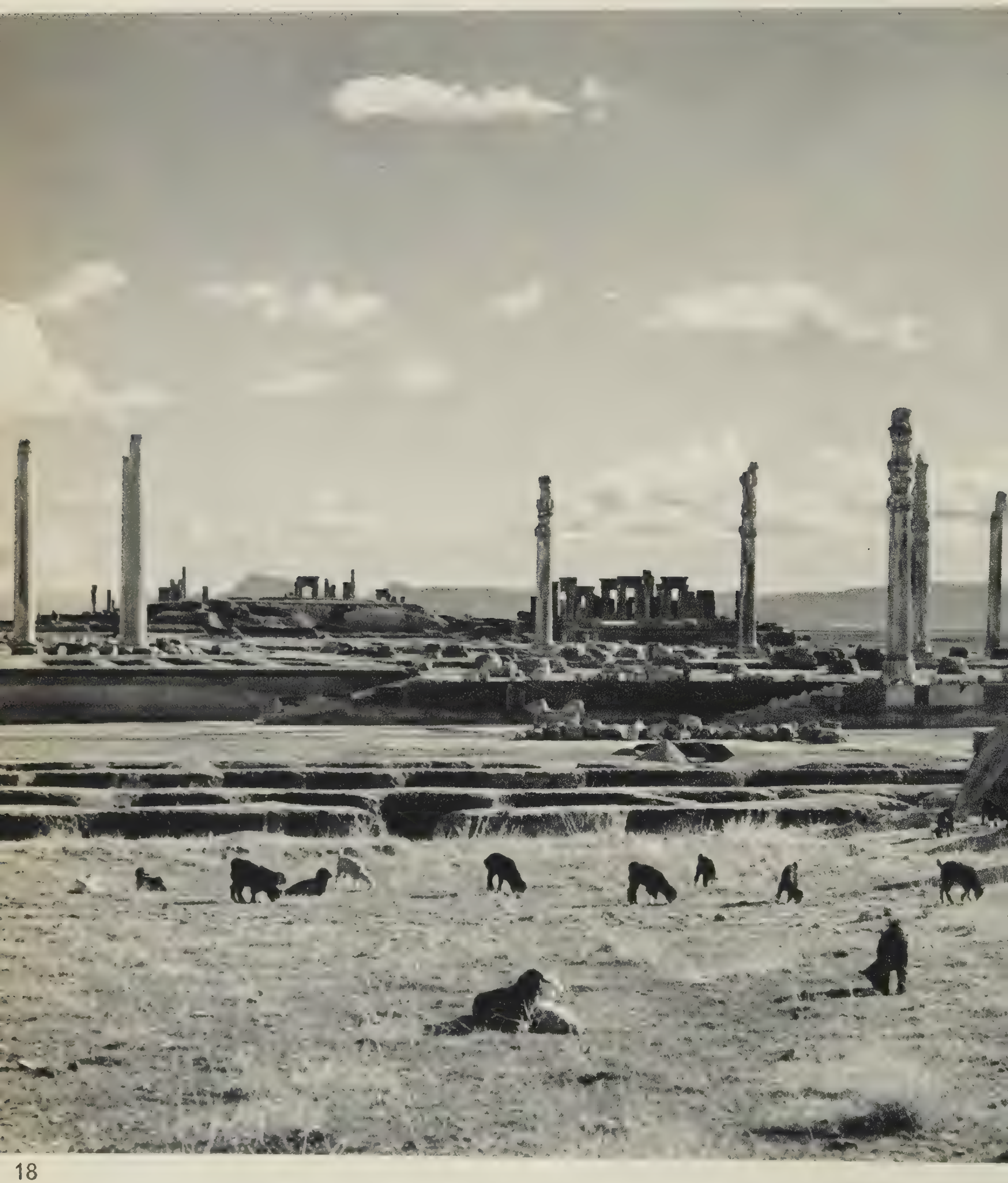

A man can be free from all anxiety about the fate of his soul; if in life he has abandoned bodily pleasures and adornments, as foreign to his purpose and likely to do more harm than good, and has devoted himself to the pleasures of acquiring knowledge; and so by decking his soul not with a borrowed beauty but with its own—with self-control, and goodness, and courage, and liberality, and truth—has fitted himself to await his journey to the next world.[1]

This is what the sage must undertake if he would win immortality. He must not merely choose to practise virtue, he must choose the way of asceticism and—other passages make it plain—that of 'mortification' of the body, that body in which his immortal soul has for a moment 'dropped anchor' in the cycle of its migrations.

◎

Go further and read in this same *Phaedo* what Socrates says to his disciples of the life of the soul with the body, and what it should be, to ensure immortality to the soul.

If at its release the soul is pure and carries with it no contamination of the body, because it has never willingly associated with it in life, but has shunned it and kept itself separate as its regular practice—in other words, if it has pursued philosophy in the right way and really practised how to face death easily: this is what 'practising death' means, isn't it? . . . if this is its condition, then it departs to that place which is, like itself, invisible, divine, immortal and wise; where, on its arrival, happiness awaits it, and release from uncertainty and folly, from fears and uncontrolled desires, and all other human evils; and where (as they say of the initiates in the Mysteries) it really spends the rest of time with God. . . . But, I suppose, if at the time of its release the soul is tainted and impure, because it has always associated with the body and cared for it and loved it, and has been so beguiled by the body and its passions and pleasures that nothing seems real to it but those physical things which can be touched and seen and eaten and drunk and used for sexual enjoyment; and if it is accustomed to hate and fear and avoid what is invisible and hidden from our eyes, but intelligible and comprehensible by philosophy—if the soul is in this state, do you think it will escape independent and uncontaminated? . . . On the contrary, it will, I imagine, be permeated by the corporeal, which fellowship and intercourse with the body will have ingrained in its very nature through constant association and long practice. . . . The corporeal is heavy, oppressive, earthly and visible. So the soul which is tainted by its presence is weighed down and dragged back into the visible world, through fear (as they say) of Hades or the invisible, and hovers about tombs and graveyards. The shadowy apparitions which

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[1] Trans. cited, pp. 152–3.

18. *Ruins of Persepolis: The Apadana. The palaces of Darius and Xerxes in the background*

have actually been seen there are the ghosts of those souls which have not got clear away, but still retain some portion of the visible; which is why they can be seen. . . .

Every seeker after wisdom knows that up to the time when philosophy takes it over his soul is a helpless prisoner, chained hand and foot in the body, compelled to view reality not directly but only through its prison bars, and wallowing in utter ignorance. And philosophy can see that the imprisonment is ingeniously effected by the prisoner's own active desire, which makes him first accessory to his own confinement. Well, philosophy takes over the soul in this condition and by gentle persuasion tries to set it free. She points out that observation by means of the eyes and ears and all the other senses is entirely deceptive, and she urges the soul to refrain from using them unless it is necessary to do so, and encourages it to collect and concentrate itself by itself, trusting nothing but its own independent judgement upon objects considered in themselves, and attributing no truth to anything which it views indirectly as being subject to variation, because such objects are sensible and visible but what the soul itself sees is intelligible and invisible. Now the soul of the true philosopher feels that it must not reject this opportunity for release, and so it abstains as far as possible from pleasures and desires and griefs, because it reflects that the result of giving way to pleasure or fear or desire is not as may be supposed the trivial misfortune of becoming ill or wasting money through self-indulgence, but the last and worst calamity of all, which the sufferer does not recognize.

What is that, Socrates? [*asks the disciple.*]

When anyone's soul feels a keen pleasure or pain it cannot help supposing that whatever causes the most violent emotion is the plainest and truest reality; which it is not. . . . Every pleasure or pain has a sort of rivet with which it fastens the soul to the body and pins it down and makes it corporeal, accepting as true whatever the body certifies. The result of agreeing with the body and finding pleasure in the same things is, I imagine, that it cannot help becoming like it in character and training, so that it can never get clean away to the unseen world, but is always saturated with the body when it sets out, and so soon falls back again into another body, where it takes root and grows. Consequently it is excluded from all fellowship with the pure and uniform and divine.[1]

It is possible that this mystical choice and this ascetic vocation which are so strikingly proclaimed in these pages are states of mind personal to Plato; but it is highly probable that the Platonic mysticism which we have seen so forcibly expressed in the *Phaedo*, and which, thanks to the *Phaedo*, reaches such heights in Christianity, has its roots in Pythagoreanism—that fervent doctrine with which Plato came into touch in Italy long before writing this work. It was in the Pythagorean school of Italy that Plato heard for the first time the famous '*sôma-*

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 106, 108–10.

sêma', the maxim identifying the body with a tomb. 'Our body is our tomb,' says Plato in the *Gorgias*, an earlier dialogue than the *Phaedo*, the last of those that can be called 'Socratic' and at the same time the first in which glimmerings can be seen of Platonic mysticism.

Socrates, in the *Gorgias*, repeats and discusses a line from Euripides—'Who knows if life be death, or death be life?'—and wonders whether in reality we are not already dead: dead and shut up in our bodily tomb. Our present life, our life of men destined to die, is not a true life; it is nothing but a death—a blind delusion delivering us over to all the follies and disorders of passion. We live in a disorder which is a kind of death, although everything in our souls aspires to order, which is light and beauty. The soul possessing order possesses existence: having in itself goodness, it is good and happy.

All this, which is in the *Gorgias*, implies knowledge of Pythagoreanism—which mingled with Socraticism gives birth to the mysticism of Plato.

The whole of human life has now to be reshaped in the spirit of these new affirmations. Our present life in the first place: Plato never renounced it. Our mortal life must be virtue, must be the practice, ever more rigid and more severe, of virtue. Plato has never renounced the man of flesh and blood—never given up hope of founding for him in this world a kingdom of virtue. If only Pericles, Cimon, Themistocles and Miltiades had possessed this science of virtue, the only science needful! If they had taught it to the Athenians, Athens would have found happiness in the practice of justice. But Athens was wrongly educated by these so-called great men, and took the other road, choosing the worst of injustices and putting to death the only true politician she possessed, Socrates the philosopher.

The others, second-rate or bad, she ostracized, imprisoned or exiled. Pericles was condemned for peculation after having been idolized.

So, until such time as Athens will choose politicians worthy of the name—that is to say, philosophers—and, freely or perforce, will follow their teachings and practise virtue (in other words until the whole of Athens is converted to virtue), Plato decides to offer his compatriots another and shorter way—the kingdom of justice he dreams of for Athens and the community of mankind is transferred, by a bold shift, to the after-life. Henceforth this double proceeding—always part of the same thought—gives life to the greater part of his work: he would found on earth a kingdom of justice, while at the same time mystically asserting the immortality of the soul in the world to come. The very same procedure is found in Christianity. The proclamation is, in Plato, a cry of passionate desire—which he believes to be the final utterance of reason. That is the most urgent and intimate meaning of his work.

Plato offers men a religion of salvation. 'To whom may we entrust our souls, and the soul of the city?' he asks with ever greater insistence. 'What is the one thing needful? What discipline can give it to us? Who will save us?'

Socrates had already come to the brink of these questionings. Plato returns to them, but in so doing clarifies them in the light of Italian Pythagoreanism. 'Even,' he says, 'if injustice may seem to triumph in this world, let us be sure that death, which strips all souls naked, will reveal the inner wretchedness of the wicked. Happy those it finds still curable! Woe to those it makes immortal in their injustice!'

All his life, or at least through the period of his mature age—that of the great poetic dialogues already named—Plato seems to have been haunted by the problem of death and the after-life. He returns to it continually; and three times, in myths of striking beauty, describes the lot of souls after death.

◎

Here is a fragment of the myth of the judgment of souls, in *Gorgias*.

So when the dead reach the judgement-seat, in the case of Asiatics the judgement seat of Rhadamanthus, Rhadamanthus summons them before him and inspects each man's soul, without knowing to whom it belongs. Often, when it is the king of Persia or some other monarch or potentate that he has to deal with, he finds that there is no soundness in the soul whatever; it is a mass of weals and scars imprinted on it by the various acts of perjury and wrong-doing of which the man has been guilty; it is twisted and warped by lies and vanity and quite out of the straight because truth has had no part in its development. Power, luxury, pride, and debauchery have left it so full of disproportion and ugliness that when he has inspected it Rhadamanthus despatches it in ignominy straight to prison, where on its arrival it will undergo the appropriate treatment. . . .

Sometimes the eye of the judge lights on a soul which has lived in purity and truth; it may or may not be the soul of a private person, but most often, . . . if I am not mistaken, it is the soul of a lover of wisdom who has kept to his own calling during his life and not been meddlesome; then Rhadamanthus is struck with admiration and dismisses him to the isles of the blessed. Aeacus discharges the same judicial function, holding, like Rhadamanthus, a staff of office in his hand; Minos, who sits as president of the court, enjoys the unique distinction of a golden sceptre; you may remember that Odysseus in Homer says that he saw him 'wielding a sceptre of gold, and pronouncing judgement in Hades'.

Personally, . . . I put faith in this story, and make it my aim to present my soul to its judge in the soundest possible state. That is why, dismissing from consideration the honours which stimulate most men's ambition, I shall keep my gaze fixed on the truth *and aspire to perfection, both in life and, when my time comes to die, in death.*[1]

In this myth as elsewhere Plato affirms his faith in divine Justice. If it punishes the guilty, it is for their good; and it crowns the soul of the just with felicity.

◎

There are cases of extreme gravity when criminals whose sins are unpardonable—in general, tyrants—are doomed to an eternity of punishment. Plato's imagination has created, not only paradise and purgatory, but also a hell with torments worthy of Dante, administered by fiery demons. Let us read the fate of the tyrant Ardiaeus.

A soul which has returned from the other world to be reincarnated, tells how

He heard one soul ask another where Ardiaeus the Great was. (This Ardiaeus was the tyrant of a city in Pamphylia some thousand years ago, who had killed his old father and elder brother and done many other wicked things, according to the story.) 'He has not come, and he never will,' was the reply. 'For this was one of the terrible things we saw. We were near the mouth of the chasm and about to go up through it after all our sufferings when we suddenly saw him and others, most of them tyrants, though there were a few who had behaved very wickedly in private life, whom the mouth [through which souls emerged from hell] would not receive when they thought they were going to pass through; for whenever anyone incurably wicked like this, or anyone who had not paid the full penalty, tried to pass, it bellowed. There were some fierce and fiery-looking men standing by, who understood the sound, and thereupon seized some and led them away, while others like Ardiaeus they bound hand and foot and neck, flung them down and flayed them, and then impaled them on thorns by the roadside; and they told the passers-by the reason why this was done and said they were to be flung into Tartarus.' And he said that the fear that the voice would sound for them as they went up was the worst of all the many fears they experienced; and when they were allowed to pass in silence their joy was great.[2]

Later still, in the *Seventh Epistle* (written by Plato when close on his seventy-fifth year, whereas *Gorgias* was composed in his early thirties), he returns to the immortality of the soul, vigorously reaffirming its truth and this time referring to the beliefs of the Orphics, whom he knew and associated with in his youth, at the time of his Italian journeys. He writes:

We ought always truly to believe the ancient and holy doctrines which declare to us that the soul is immortal and that it has judges and pays the greatest penalties, when-

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[1] *Gorgias*, translated by W. Hamilton, Penguin Classics, 1960, pp. 144–5, 147–8.

[2] *Republic*, translated by H. D. P. Lee, Penguin Classics, 1955, pp. 395–6.

soever a man is released from his body; wherefore also one should account it a lesser evil to suffer than to perform the great iniquities and injustices. But to these doctrines the man who is fond of riches but poor in soul listens not, or if he listens he laughs them (as he thinks) to scorn, while he shamelessly plunders from all quarters everything which he thinks likely to provide himself, like a beast, with food or drink or the satiating himself with the slavish and graceless pleasure which is miscalled by the name of the Goddess of Love; for he is blind and fails to see what a burden of sin—how grave an evil—ever accompanies each wrong-doing; which burden the wrongdoer must of necessity drag after him both while he moves about on earth and when he has gone beneath the earth again on a journey that is unhonoured and in all ways utterly miserable.[1]

Once more Plato shows our earthly life as a place of exile and of transit, and death as a door open on wide prospects of expiation and punishment. This time he has forgotten rewards.

It is with the utmost assurance then, whether he echoes the Orphics or the Pythagoreans, that Plato proclaims the immortality of the soul. Throughout his vast work, this is one of the loftiest themes of his mysticism and one of the most original of his faith—at least compared with the earlier Hellenic tradition as a whole. The most fruitful of his themes, too, if we relate it to the beliefs which were to prevail for so long in the centuries to come, in the western communities that arose out of Hellenic, or later out of Greco-Roman, civilization.

In the confusion of the last centuries of the pre-Christian era, which was to be followed by so many other ages of confusion, this belief was to be the most enduring confidence and the most effective consolation to which human despair could cling. Plato, with his authority and his genius, wrought valiantly to maintain it.

Nevertheless, this long obstinate struggle of his to prove the immortality of the soul appears today a rather paltry and unworthy preoccupation. If one did not fear to be in bad taste, one might say that the problem and Plato's solution come a little too close to the barber's promise of 'free shaves tomorrow'. If we can only learn to say 'we' when for so long we have said 'I', the question that has tortured humanity for centuries will fade from our minds.

◎

However we must ask once more what were the causes of that singular change of perspective clearly indicated in the thought of Plato. These causes we have so far been able to see only in passing, in the background of this study, in the course of the great impulse that carried the Greek people forward towards the conquest of a civilization made for man and for the present life; a civilization made to provide, against the all-powerful forces of nature which were yet unknown, as well as against no less menacing social pressures, liberation, security, and welfare for all enjoying the rights of citizens.

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[1] Translated by Harold N. Fowler, Loeb Classical Library, Vol. I, p. 511.

And yet this civilization which seems to spring up from the ground with the undeniable strength of a young tree, shows from the beginning, for all the vitality and beauty of its growth, inadequacies, gaps, failures in its creative movement, which are clear signs that it will never be capable of winning all earth and heaven for mankind.

It comes to show wounds too. The imperialist war at the end of the fifth century, and the destitution in Attica which accompanied and followed the defeat, had already, in Plato's youth and at the beginning of the fourth century, made Athens a city of desolation. The town walls and public buildings were falling into ruin; the treasury was empty; the judges could only be paid out of the confiscations and fines they inflicted. As close as the Saronic Gulf, in the vicinity of Piraeus, the sea was in the hands of pirates, or the enemy's privateers, who were capturing food convoys. Food supply for the city was in fact becoming very difficult, and was controlled by Draconian regulations. Athens was hungry—sudden famines were always breaking out. When Demosthenes describes the people of Piraeus 'trampling on each other in the public market to get rations of a quarter of a peck of barley meal', we may guess what feeling must have been rife among the humbler folk in the port. The fluctuations in the price of wine and bread in Athens, beginning at the second half of the century, are enough to indicate an economic crisis at its height.

Every social class reveals appetites, legitimate or uncontrolled. This is Plato's own description, on his return from his travels, of the inhuman society which, only a little earlier, Socrates had sought to win to an ideal of justice—now it is a battleground where greed-maddened animals fight for their food.

> *They bend over their tables, like sheep with heads bent over their pasture and eyes on the ground, they stuff themselves and copulate, and in their greed for more they kick and butt each other with hooves and horns of steel, and kill each other because they are not satisfied, as they cannot be. . . .*[1]

Indeed, a violent economic crisis had broken out in Athens before the death of Plato. The war at least they thought had been liquidated by the defeat of Athens and her imperialistic ambitions (that illusion is too common to need any emphasis here): but in the fourth century war seemed inseparable from the democratic régime in Athens—unless it was inseparable from the successive rises of the

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 124.

Spartan, Theban and Macedonian dominions. In the imminent ruin of every city, every man thought he would have time to try his own hand at seizing greatness; thus war in the fourth century became the grim permanent backcloth of the whole Greek world.

On the other hand Athens, impoverished and still obsessed with its unquenchable pride, was finding it harder and harder to export the produce of her agriculture (oil and wine) and industry (ceramics). In the past she had had abundant markets, in the Aegean islands, in the lands on the North coast from Thrace to Byzantium, in the region of the Bosphorus, and beyond, over a great part of Asia Minor. But now these islands had shaken off the economic as well as the political yoke of Athens; and the Athenian trader found himself more and more facing a prosperous native industry and agriculture which rendered it useless to hawk Attic products there. In 380, in his *Panegyric*, Isocrates could still write of Piraeus that it was a market in the centre of Greece abounding in produce of all kinds: but no later than 356, Xenophon in his *Revenues of Athens*, although displaying 'official' optimism, spoke of the need for a return of peace to bring merchants back to Athens and restore its former prosperity to Piraeus. The *Panegyric* and the *Revenues* are separated by the quarter-century which saw the fall of the Second Athenian Confederacy. The second work looks back with longing to the time when Athens held unchallenged the hegemony conferred on her by the rest of the Greeks in recognition of her services; the author dimly felt that the economic and financial crisis explained the general disequilibrium and the decline of Athenian power.

Here archaeology comes in to confirm the suggestions of literary texts. The fairly recent diggings made in the lands of Athens' former clients—in Bulgaria, Rumania, the Crimea, Iran and Asia Minor—reveal the presence in the fourth century of increasing numbers of objects of local manufacture, funerary urns, weapons and jewels. Athens had lost her economic supremacy. Unceasing wars and economic difficulties had brought her greatness to the ground.

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After the wounds, which we may look on as the normal ransom, in history, of any over-rapid and over-brief period of expansion, let us look at the congenital weaknesses of Greek civilization as a whole.

Is there any need to go back over the incredible blindness of antiquity in allowing the growth within its communities (even those that were pseudo-democratic) of slavery, which eventually was bound to destroy its civilization and way of life? But there is nothing incredible in such blindness—it was forced on the men of those days by what was best in them, their consuming desire to grow in all directions—to build new temples and new theatres in new territories, to sail in discovery of unknown countries, win new markets, exchange new material goods, and assert their human presence in every place. All this without one of the tools which developing sciences and techniques were later to put into men's hands.

In fact they felt not at all hampered by the absence of tools and machines. They had both, in what seemed to them limitless abundance—since they had slaves.

Here a figure claims our attention. According to the historian Ctesicles, in a census of the population of Attica at the end of the fourth century, there were in Athens, in the service of twenty-one thousand citizens and ten thousand metics able to bear arms—four hundred thousand slaves. Presumably the number included women and children. Most modern historians contest this enormous figure: but they seem to contest it really only because they cannot bring themselves to admit that Greek civilization was a civilization founded on slavery. We should face the truth. The great Greek scholar George Thomson accepts the figure; though he and Gernet are almost the only authorities who do. No doubt they realize that without this vast slave force Athens could never have built the Parthenon, or shouldered in other ways the burden of her destiny; they also realize that these figures were later to be the destruction of Athens and of Greece. But the time of that decline had not yet come; nor could it come so long as it was as 'natural' for an Athenian to have slaves as it was to drink, eat and sleep. Such is still the case in the earlier dialogues of Plato. But later, while he plans the creation of his ideal cities, he begins to lose his clear conscience in the matter, or at least he comes to see that slavery needs to be justified. He does justify it as best he can, not without embarrassment and awkwardness. For Plato slavery is after all a *reality*, and his visionary propensities give way here to his profound realism: he knows that slaves *exist*, and that is all he wants to know about them. He cannot see what Aristotle, more logical and more percipient, sees clearly—that in Athens slavery is a necessity dictated by the city's economic development, and bound up with its commercial expanison and financial stability; to put it more plainly, demanded by Athenian hegemony, Athenian imperialism. But Plato, who could hardly fail to see that aspect of the truth, shrank from stating it. For him, as for any average Athenian, slaves are inferior and ignorant beings which are accepted as being such; slavery is simply a natural phenomenon, taken for granted.

Aristotle explains in the *Politics* that there exist two kinds of machines, inanimate, and animate; thus the pilot has at his disposal a rudder, which is inanimate, and a look-out, which is animate. Therefore the plentiful supply of 'animate machinery' dispenses men from constructing 'inanimate machinery'. We must add that a kind of mental inertia dissuades man from trying to replace what he has—the old methods of labour proved in generations of experience—by harebrained innovations of dubious value: this machinery, compared with slavery, still seems a pipe-dream. Then, as we know, the argument turns on itself and forms a formidable vicious circle—a circle almost all the ancients failed to break out of. If the abundance of labour makes it pointless to invent machines, the absence of machines on the other hand means that it is absolutely impossible to do without slaves.

All the more—to support this argument with another—since, as it has fairly recently been discovered, the harness used for horses was such that animal traction had a very low efficiency-ratio. The horse's collar, instead of fitting round its shoulders as it does today, pressed against its throat like a dog's, threatening to strangle it at the slightest effort.

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But the existence of slavery did not merely create conditions such that it seemed economically unnecessary to construct machines; it brought with it—and this is perhaps the most serious point—a particular hierarchy of values, involving scorn for manual work. Plato's *Gorgias* contrasts the mechanical arts, which are for slaves, with the liberal arts, practised by free men in their leisure. After emphasizing the capital importance of the role of the engineer, who may sometimes save cities from the enemy, he states:

> *All the same you despise him and his art and use the term 'mechanic' [or 'engineer'] as a term of contempt, and you would not hear of marrying your daughter to his son or taking his daughter to wife yourself.*[1]

Herodotus had already noted this general attitude of scorn—'It is common among Greeks', he says, 'especially Lacedemonians; among Barbarians too. Less frequent in Corinth'—the commercial and industrial city *par excellence*; no doubt at Athens too. Yet in Athens Socrates is blamed for his 'mechanical' similes, when he does not hesitate to take his examples from curriers and shoemakers.

Plutarch tells how Plato fell out with his friends Archytas and Eudoxus because they were trying to solve certain geometrical problems with the aid of mechanical apparatus.

> *But after that,* writes Plutarch (or his translator Amyot[2]), *Plato was offended with them, and mainteined [sic] against them, that they did utterly corrupt and disgrace the worthines and excellency of Geometry, making it to discende from things not comprehensible, and without body, unto things sencible and materiall, and to bring it to a palpable substance, where the vile and base handie worke of man is to be*

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 124.

[2] From whom North made his translation, reproduced here (David Nutt, 1895, Vol. III; *Life of Marcellus*, p. 350); cf. p. 152, note 1.

employed: since that time I say, handy craft, or the arte of engines, came to be separated from Geometry, and being long time despised by the Philosophers, it came to be one of the warlike artes.

Plato lays down in his *Laws* that no citizen shall ever carry on a mechanical trade; and Aristotle says that in the ideal city no craftsman will ever be a citizen. From the time of Plato the word *banausos*, meaning 'craftsman', becomes debased and takes the sense of 'base' or 'ignoble'—all that pertains to handicraft deforms soul and body together.

For Plato, philosophy, the supreme art aimed at motionless contemplation (through which the soul will gain its immortality), is opposed to the work of labourers, craftsmen or traders, which aims only at ends of a perishable nature. His distant disciple, the great Plotinus, says even more plainly, 'Contemplation is the supreme end of all action'; he gives as a model for our activity the contemplative life of earth, trees and plants, which 'produce living things without need of any instrument, as for example a lever, wherewith to produce them,' but solely by contemplation.

Such then, after Plato, is the end of the movement of thought that began in Ionia with men like Thales, an engineer at the same time as a savant and a sage. Plato is clean against this tendency towards the creation of scientific technics, which would sooner or later have culminated in the invention and development of machinery.

Plotinus on the other hand, in the third century A.D., marks the full flowering of the trend of Plato. This strange man, of whom one of his disciples tells that he 'seemed to blush to dwell in a body', spent his life, not in writing—a paltry occupation!—but in trying to go beyond both reason and imagination, both the sensible and the intelligible, in order to win free from the world of determinism and at last attain to God, God in his empty purity, and mingle his soul with him in ecstasy. 'Make yourselves like God,' Plato had already enjoined; and from him, clearly, comes the dream, with its delirium of ecstasy, of Plotinus.

Another step on the way to Christianity.

As for the condemnation of slavery because it is destined to manual tasks, to the base use of tools wielded by hand and working on matter, such a condemnation bears implicit in it that scorn for sensible Reality which is characteristic of the Platonic philosophy. After this it becomes the most natural thing in the world to turn Reality as one turns a coat, and wear it inside out; to declare utterly meaningless the activity to which we are compelled by day-to-day reality—the reality we transform by hard but fruitful effort—and to proclaim that only the life of contemplation can fill our souls with joy. This is a way of consoling our wretchedness, and the despair inherent in our mortal condition. By dedicating our souls—the only important part of ourselves—to the contemplation of God alone even in this world, Plato prepares them for the absolute bliss to which they are destined by their natures after the death of the body.

This bliss is the state of the soul, liberated at length from the body and permitted to contemplate supreme Beauty. To this vision of his Plato gives the most splendid shape, elaborating the mirage with the tireless patience of a flower-embroideress. Here he is reporting with devout respect the instructions of Diotima to Socrates in the *Symposium.*

> *'A man finds it truly worth while to live, as he contemplates essential beauty. This, when once beheld, will outshine your gold and your vesture, your beautiful boys and striplings, whose aspect now so astounds you and makes you and many another, at the sight and constant society of your darlings, ready to do without either food or drink if that were any way possible, and only gaze upon them and have their company. But tell me, what would happen if one of you had the fortune to look upon essential beauty entire, pure and unalloyed; not infected with the flesh and colour of humanity, and ever so much more of mortal trash? What if he could behold the divine beauty itself, in its unique form? Do you call it a pitiful life for a man to lead—looking that way, observing that vision by the proper means, and having it ever with him? Do but consider,' she said, 'that there only will it befall him, as he sees the beautiful through that which makes it visible [the mind's eye], to breed not illusions but true examples of virtue, since his contact is not with illusion but with truth. So when he has begotten a true virtue and has reared it up he is destined to win the friendship of Heaven; he, above all men, is immortal.'*[1]

In a passage like this we feel at the same time the deep love and the boundless distaste that Plato has for sensible reality. The paradoxical circuit of his metaphysics is chosen to enable him both to attain it and escape it. Contemplation of pure Beauty, communion with God—no other mirage could be vast and deep and convincing enough to console him for being a man.

◎

In a later age it was Plato who opened for the great Augustine the gates of the City of God. In the middle of difficulties, part moral and part intellectual, which were still holding him back on the verge of the Catholic faith—caught in the toils of the Manichean heresy, or perhaps, more simply, the prisoner of his own unbridled sensuality—St Augustine discovered, so he writes, 'the books of the Platonists' translated into Latin. They were works by Plato, and also the book of

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[1] *Symposium*, translated by W. R. M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library, 1925, Vol. V, pp. 207–9.

Plotinus written up by Porphyry for his master. The *Confessions* relate how the mind of Augustine was full of his reading of Greek philosophy when he came with a new heart to the Scriptures, 'recognizing therein all that he had been reading in the books of the philosophers', except of course the mystery of the Incarnation.

Everyone knows the famous scene in the *Confessions*, when, at prayer in a garden, he thought he heard the heavenly voice of a child singing 'Take and read, take and read', and opening at random the writings of the apostle Paul, which had long been his constant study, found the words '. . . not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness. . . . But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof'.

From that day Augustine renounced Manicheism, gave up his life of debauchery, withdrew into the mountains with his mother and a few friends, and led what the Greeks called the *bios philosophicos*, already adopted by the Christian anchorites. Converted, baptized, ordained priest not long after, the day came when he was acclaimed by the multitude of the faithful as Bishop of Hippo, the first city in Africa after Carthage.

From the vast body of his works that have been preserved (113 books, 500 sermons, countless epistles) it is easy to see that it was through St Augustine, full as he was of the 'writings of the Platonists', and in the course of his controversies with multitudinous heresies, that the essence of Catholic doctrine came to be constituted.

We need not recount that history once again—it would lead us into very diverse fields, to Thomism, and also to the Reformation, and to Humanism (not forgetting the Jansenists, and that grave 'affair' which was occasioned in the French Church by Pope Urban VIII's condemnation of the *Augustinus* of Cornelius Jansen), and to some of the great names of French literature.

We need only listen to the testimony of La Bruyère in his chapter *Des Esprits forts*.[1] After mentioning Basil, Jerome, Augustine, La Bruyère exclaims:

> *A Father of the Church, a Doctor of the Church? What titles! What tedium in their writings, what dullness, what frigid piety, and what scholasticism perhaps! say those who have never read them. But what a surprise for all those who have formed an idea of the Fathers so remote from the truth, if they were to discover that their works contain more style and subtlety, more urbanity and wit, more richness of expression and weight of argument, more vivid touches and more natural graces than may be found in most of the books of today which are read with pleasure, and give reputation and vanity to their authors! What a pleasure to love religion and see it believed, maintained, expounded, by such noble talents and such sturdy minds; above all when one comes to*

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[1] Ch. XVI of *Les Caractères* (1687).

recognise that for breadth of knowledge, depth and penetration, for the principles of purest philosophy, . . . for dignity of utterance, for beauty of morals and sentiments, there is nothing to compare, for instance, with St. Augustine but Plato and Cicero!

But let us not be distracted from the essential, which is this.

Augustine, after Plato and according to Plato, teaches man to contemplate God with the eyes of the soul beyond the world of bodies, to discern his invisible perfections through created things. For Augustine as for Plato, these perfections are Ideas of God projected into the world of being. But it is not only Plato's thought which enters Christian theology through Augustinism, but much more: most forms of mysticism, all the escapes of the soul athirst for God which come from St Augustine, go back to Plato and to his great disciple, the greatest and the most ecstatic—Plotinus, the seer blinded by all the mirages that fill the human desert.

In this way Plato joins and anticipates the mirage of Christianity.

A phrase of Pascal in the *Pensées* throws a simple, but blinding light on what we have tried to show in this chapter. It is this:

> Platon pour disposer au christianisme.
> *Plato, to turn men's minds to Christianity.*

◆

Even so, in one sense, in spite of the new direction he imparted to Greek humanism, Plato is the most Greek of all Greek writers.

He is Greek by his astounding love of myths—not only of myths inherited from tradition, but most often (although it is not always possible to be sure) myths that he invents, drawing them from his own resources of imagination to express the most unsuspected shades of meaning. There is not another Greek writer to equal him for creative imagination, unless perhaps Aristophanes, or else the poet of the *Iliad*, who, as the ancients said, 'was inventing the gods'. Plato's invention of the flight of souls through the heaven of Ideas has the same audacious liberty as the meeting of Zeus and Hera on Ida, in Homer. 'Inventions', within the limits of their beliefs; for one as for the other.

The word poetry in Greek means 'invention' and 'creation' even before it means 'poetry'. It would be a platitude to say once again after so many others that Plato is a great poet, the greatest in the fourth century. What ought rather to be said—and the praise is no less high—is that he writes a wonderful prose, the finest, I suppose, of any Greek; and this in a century and in a language which have the honour of belonging to Demosthenes.

◆

Plato can use every tone—all at the same time—with the most natural-seeming ease. He passes from the simple to the sublime with an acrobatic daring that sends a shiver up the spine. Twenty, thirty times in succession, the disciple answers 'yes' to the master's questions—enough to make you grind your teeth, if it were in any other language than Greek (look at the translations), but it is, twenty or thirty times, a different 'yes'—pregnant with unspoken reservation; sometimes close to our *sans doute*;[1] and sometimes a 'yes' so near to 'no' that we tremble and cling tight to our common sense for fear of mis-translating.

All that is still only Plato being simple—the variety of any good writer of prose.

But soon the sentence draws out its length and begins to move—begins, if you like, to dance. A wind has risen over the dust of words. They whirl and rise into the sky at ever-increasing speed; the orbit of the period widens. We are in the magician's hand—caught up, close to the sun, glowing with comprehension and seized with the very madness he has described. We understand not now through our own tongue, but in the marvellous language Plato plays with, or juggles with. It becomes the rhythm of our breathing.

We understand—but what? The truth Plato has to communicate. The truth which is really a compelling mirage—but the magician has enchanted us. Simply because he is, doubtless, the greatest poet-*prosateur* of all the centuries.

As Montaigne says, he has that 'poeticall kinde of march, by frisks, skips, and jumps. It is an arte (saith Plato) light, nimble, fleeting, and light-brained'. He has a language which is fresh however long it wells up, and a naturalness which is a continual surprise but never an astonishment. 'Oh God!' Montaigne continues, 'what grace hath the variation, and what beautie these startings and nimble escapes!' All the more so, the more closely this naturalness seems 'to employ carelessnesse and casualtie'.

Plato has that fresh resourcefulness of 'the best antient prose' (it is still Montaigne speaking)—that which 'shineth everywhere with a poeticall vigour and boldnesse, and representeth some aire or touch of its fury. . . . A poet (saith Plato)'—like Plato himself in his prose—'seated on the Muses' footstoole doth in a furie powre out whatsoever commeth in his mouth, as the pipe or cocke of a fountaine, without considering or ruminating the same: and many things escape him, diverse in colour, contrary in substance, and broken in course. Antient divinitie is altogether poesie (say the learned) and the first philosophie. It is the original language of the gods'.[2]

When Montaigne thus describes Plato's style—'the original language of the gods'—he gives us the key to the spell that binds us. Plato charms, because he seems to use a language pregnant with hidden meaning—we grasp his drift though it eludes our reason. It is by verbal beauty that he wins and cheats us, and we are not angry to be cheated by him.

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[1] 'I dare say.'

[2] *Essayes* (III, ix), translated by John Florio, Routledge, 1891, p. 510. This translation was published 1603.

Add to that the magic of his musical composition.

Never, or very rarely, does he compose as a rhetorician, in accordance with the precepts of the fine, reasonable and always ingenious art which the sophists had invented in his day and which he never ceased to attack. He composes according to the laws of ecstasy. There are more kinds than one: but none, so he has told is, is closer to his own genius than the madness he receives as a divine gift from the goddesses of all music, the Muses.

The principal themes of his dialogues—whether it is Justice in the city, or whether it is Love—are never introduced first and then expanded, as a schoolboy might, or a schoolman. They make their appearance in the manner of musical themes, first in the role of a secondary melodic motif, episodic, in the half-shadow of a question thrown out, or in the sound-background of the conversation. Then we may find that the ripple running ahead over the sand suddenly swells; the new theme carries away the speakers amid the waves of opposing passions and forces itself on us. Our minds are penetrated and steadily permeated, until the attention is overburdened and snaps—to let the truth work on wordlessly in the silence of the unconscious. Twice in the *Symposium* such breaks of tone intervene—the hiccuping of Aristophanes, then the entry of Alcibiades in his cups, relax the gravity of the discussion by a laughter that always brings release.

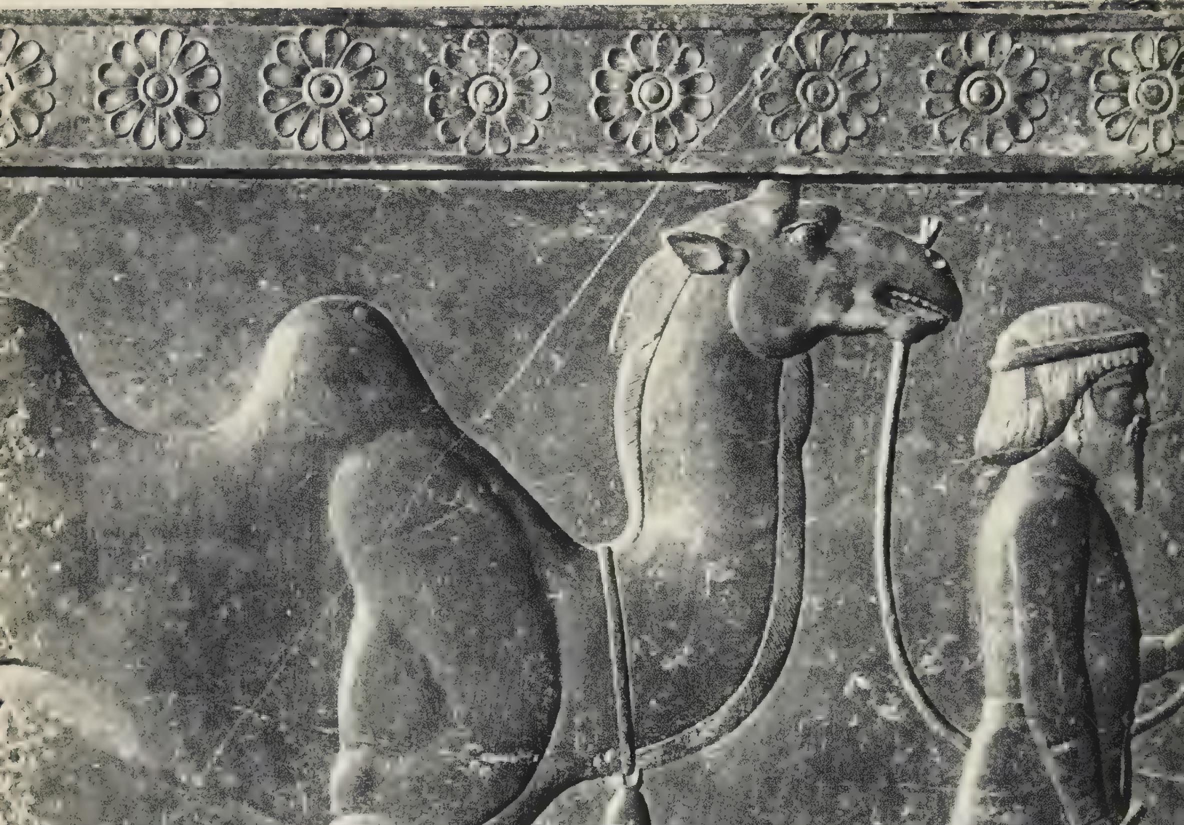
◎

A dialogue of Plato never has the artificiality and dryness of a strict demonstration. It is a living rhythm, it is the ever-flowing movement of that other unending dialogue which our own thoughts hold inside us, with its opposing themes pursuing, overlaying and supplanting one another as unendingly they carry on the quest for truth.

In this too Plato is Greek. At the other extremity of the chain of history we find Odysseus unceasingly consulting 'his heart and mind' within his breast.

Whoever has loved Plato in his own language, in Greek—not in order to translate him (that torment!), but loved him sensually, as one loves a fruit that melts in one's parched mouth—whoever has loved Greek with delight deep as a wound, knows that Plato's sentences can pierce him with inexpressible delight, rouse—or perhaps revive—in him hopes not felt before, and charm his whole being—soul and body one for ever, or if only for a moment. It alone traffics in immortality; it alone has had the power to pass off the wildest illusion ever con-

19. *Ruins of Persepolis: 36 columns each 20 metres high* (18 *metres in their present state*)



ceived by mankind—eternal life—as a tangible reality, a morsel of bread to stave off hunger.

Is it possible to yield to the intoxication of this unearthly language—to yield to this enchanter? Yes, perhaps, if one could think that the words he uses have in his language a secondary sense, a sense beyond our grasp, and yet certain?—The word soul, for instance?

But no: it cannot be so. Reason cannot mean unreason; death does not cease to be death, that is to say annihilation. If, for many centuries, it was otherwise, then Plato is one of the principal authors of that derangement of human common sense. Was that enough to earn the name of the divine Plato?

20. *Persepolis: tribute bearers leading a camel, bas-relief from staircase of Xerxes, Apadana*

CHAPTER EIGHT

ARISTOTLE AND THE WORLD OF LIVING CREATURES

Plato and Aristotle were two great figures, not only in the history of philosophy, but in the history of humanity: each of them was a 'genius'—but what does that mean? The term has often been taken in vain. It means (after consulting Littré and other dictionaries) that these two carried their proficiency in their craft—'philosophizing'—beyond the limits known up to their day. The term genius implies a surpassing, a discovery, a *creation*. And since philosophy is an art of living, and Plato and Aristotle tried to make concrete changes in that art by changing human beings, we may expect humans to be different after them (and after Alexander, the third genius of the age) from what they were before.

By them, and with the aid of the peoples whom they both taught and represented, a civilization was transformed, stripped of its past, renovated. Soon it was to need a new name—it had been Greek or Hellenic: it was now to take the name Hellenistic, before it changed even more completely and became Christian civilization—if that wonderful myth ever truly existed.

Aristotle was born at Stagira, a Greek town on the coast of Thrace, in 384 B.C. (Plato is thus his elder by forty-three years). He spent his earliest childhood at Pella, the capital of Macedonia, where his father Nicomachus was the physician and friend of King Amyntas, the father of Philip of Macedonia. He came of one of those families of Asclepiadae in which Galen tells us that physicians taught their sons how to dissect. But Aristotle lost his father too early to benefit from this custom, which for him remained as a kind of family legend.

At seventeen, he came to Athens to study, and entered Plato's school, the Academy. For his old master, vigorous as the green shoots of spring for all his advanced years, he developed a deep admiration and a strong affection, which did not inhibit criticism. Over the disagreements of the two the ancients have forged some ridiculous tales, but they have also drawn from them the noble adage they attribute to Aristotle: *Amicus Plato, sed magis amica Veritas*—'I love Plato, but Truth still more.' 'A colt kicking up its heels against its dam' said Plato smilingly of Aristotle's criticisms.

Moreover, to call the theory of Ideas into question was to earn the master's friendship. Plato himself, at more than sixty, did not let his own philosophy lie fallow; he was always working over it, testing or contesting its value. In this joint though divergent criticism by master and pupil their indestructible friendship had its roots.

Aristotle gave Plato another proof of this loyalty, by remaining attached to the Academy and continuing to take part in its discussions until his master's death, in his own thirty-eighth year. Most probably Plato—who held him in the highest esteem, and had nicknamed him 'the Mind'—had given him a teaching post in his school, perhaps in rhetoric.

In 347 Plato died and Aristotle left Athens. Though he had never taken active part in politics, his life was more than once affected by the struggle which had begun between Athens and Macedonia. In 347 the relations between the two were still bad, in spite of the mock peace which they had contracted in the middle of the campaign of the *Philippics*, with Demosthenes' full approval. Aristotle had no liking for the Macedonian régime, and never showed in his political works the slightest preference for the autocratic rule of Philip; none the less in Athens, in the prevalent cold-war atmosphere, he was regarded as an alien and a suspect on account of the bonds of friendship he still had with the Macedonian court.

He left Athens therefore, and settled first in Mysia, at Assos, with Hermias, an ex-slave of dubious morals, who had been a fellow-pupil at the Academy and had since become tyrant of Assos. There Aristotle carried out his first researches in natural history, which he continued in Mytilene on Lesbos. He had married the adopted daughter of Hermias, the princess Pythias, for whom he always displayed deep affection.

It was in Lesbos and Asia Minor that he frequented fishermen and undertook his patient observations on fish and crustaceans which abound in his *Researches on Animals*, published much later.

Meanwhile Philip of Macedonia, looking for a master to educate his fourteen-year-old son Alexander, settled on Aristotle. The future monarch of the entire world thus had for his teacher the greatest savant of his time, the paragon of learning whom, fifteen centuries after his death, the prince of mediaeval poets rightly magnified in his *Inferno* as 'the master of those that know'. What came of this remarkable combination—this extraordinary paradox whereby the apostle of the golden mean, and of common sense in pursuit of the attainable, was given charge of the rash seeker after the impossible, and the impossible attained? It must be admitted that we do not really know. The philosopher did not foresee what a revolution was implied in his pupil's great dream—he condemned the burning desire behind it, the fusion of the two ancient worlds, barbarian and Greek. As for the master of the world, he learned from Aristotle to cherish the *Iliad* as an unrivalled masterpiece and never be parted from it: he did not learn to master his wild passions as well as he tamed Bucephalus.

The dialogue between thinker and heir-apparent lasted two years, in a residence set among woods, dedicated to the Muses. (Was culture already forsaking the active world?) Then Philip recalled Alexander to take over, at sixteen, the regency of his kingdom while he left it on a military expedition.

A little later, after Chaeronea and the assassination of Philip, Aristotle returned to Athens, and founded his school, the Lyceum, named after a neighbouring gymnasium dedicated to Lycian Apollo. It was set up in several buildings in a large park planted with fine trees. Aristotle taught as he walked with his pupils, discussing the finer points of logic and metaphysics—these were the morning lectures, known by the slightly pedantic term of 'esoteric', and reserved for advanced disciples. During the afternoon, in one of the houses, he gave 'exoteric' lectures, or lessons for the general public, on subjects likely to be of wider interest—rhetoric, literature or political questions; these were followed by discussions. The difference between morning and afternoon lectures lay in the greater or less difficulty of the subjects; but no secret teaching, no mystical tendency distinguished the teaching reserved for the narrower circle.

With Alexander's help Aristotle gathered at the Lyceum large collections of material—a library which was, after that of Euripides, the first to be formed by a private person; and botanical and zoological museums, forerunners of those in the future great Museum of Alexandria. In his works on natural history were found references to volumes of illustrations, of animals and plants. Drawing up these albums of 'anatomical drawings' was an important task, requiring a great effort of precision; it also implied familiarity with the dissection of animals.

Aristotle taught for a dozen years at the Lyceum. Then, on the death of Alexander, he had to leave Athens, so widespread by then was the hate of Macedonia and its friends, even the least militant and most inoffensive. Accused like Socrates of impiety, he is said to have remarked on leaving 'I have no wish to let the Athenians commit another crime against philosophy'. He left the school to his disciple Theophrastus and withdrew to Chalcis in Euboea, where he had inherited an estate from his mother. There, the following year, he died of a stomach disease—he was only sixty-two.

His will has been preserved. It informs us of several details of his private life. After the death of his first wife the princess Pythias, Aristotle lived faithfully for years with a *hetaira* named Herpylis, who had borne him a son named Nicomachus. He had also a daughter by Pythias, and finally an adopted son Nicanor. The will directed that Nicanor was to marry the daughter of Pythias, and left Herpylis, the philosopher's concubine, the choice between his paternal home at Stagira and one of his houses in Chalcis.

A modern historian comments on this will: 'Decidedly, it is not too much to say that Aristotle was an excellent husband, a loving and devoted father, and a fine man.' Why not? A genius can also be a fine man. If, however, this judgment on Aristotle were of the slightest consequence, we should need to retouch it, and to add that the 'excellent husband' indulged with a clear conscience, but with unusual ardour, in relations with boys—which Plato had sternly condemned. But does it matter?

◆

A different passion interests us far more in Aristotle: his eagerness, untouched by any interest in mere anecdote, to know and possess the whole world, all nature and all that is in it, discover its meaning and communicate it to others. The 'torch of science' (threadbare metaphor) he was one of the first to bear with honour on the road to humanity; he was one of the *founders* of science.

The whole immense work of Aristotle, however disparate we may think the directions it explores and the fields it discovers, testifies to this passion for discovery and communication, which is the essential gift of every savant as well as his ultimate accomplishment. So, in Aristotle, logic and biology, metaphysics and ethics, psychology and theology are disparate conquests only in appearance; he enfolds them in so finely conceived a synthesis that each part not only takes its rightful place in the whole, but, properly understood, could take by itself the place of the whole.

In introducing Aristotle the naturalist, therefore, I feel I am offering a view of his thought, not mutilated, but as concrete and all-embracing as it can be made in the modest scope and intention of this book.

In any case, nothing in his work was closer to his heart, or held a larger place in his life, than the study of living things. The importance of biology in the corpus of his work may be measured in the first place by the material size of his treatises on the subject: they account for about a third of all that is preserved. In three works of considerable length he has shown extraordinary intensity of research in this field. The abundance of facts, the conscientiousness of the research, and, most frequently, the reliability of the information are conspicuous in the *History of Animals* (the nine authentic books—the tenth is spurious), now more often and more suitably referred to[1] as *Researches on Animals*. The work is an incredible mine of facts concerning five hundred different species of animals (or more exactly, 495). Of two other important works, later than this, the first is entitled, *The Parts of Animals* (in four books); here Aristotle is concerned not only to describe comparative animal anatomy, but to set out, on the basis of a wide synthesis, the functions of the animal body and explain the working of the organs. The other, the *Generation of Animals* (in five books) is principally a study of the various modes of reproduction among animals (including spontaneous generation) as well as a study of animal embryology.

Besides these three large works—the most important in size and contents—must be noted a number of psychologico-biological treatises known as the *Parva Naturalia* (minor studies in natural history) which are full of acute and profound remarks. The most important are: *Sense and the Sensible*, *Sleep*, *The Length and Shortness of Life*, *Youth and Age*, *Life and Death*, and *Breathing*. The treatise on *Divination by Dreams* is a masterpiece of observation, sense and scientific spirit. We should also mention the *Gait of Animals*, in which Aristotle studies and defines admirably the mechanics of locomotion in quadrupeds: their normal limb sequence is 'diagonal', and he explains with great precision why.

In each of these little works the author seems to have the whole animal world at his finger-tips, from man to crustaceans and molluscs. Some of the studies are rapid, but none are ever fanciful or arbitrary. Aristotle starts from the facts, compares, and tries to understand.

I would mention lastly a work which is placed—deliberately, to all appearances—at the head of the corpus of biological studies; a surprising work, most unexpected in this position: *The Soul*. It is in fact a treatise on biology, and serves in some sort as a preface to the study of all animals. The term 'soul' is not charged with the spiritualist meanings usually attached to it by modern writers. Aristotle explicitly quarrels with philosophers who deal only with the human soul under this name; for him the soul represents the principle of life in the whole animal creation. His treatise on *The Soul* might be called *Life, its essential functions and its principle*. As someone has said, Aristotle studies, not animals, but the animal (man included), in all its aspects. And to study animals, he takes the living creature.

This conception of the soul, does not, in fact, directly imply the adoption of any metaphysical position—it would be as compatible with a materialist as with a spiritualist philosophy. To say that the biologist studies the soul is the same thing as saying that he studies the organization and activity of the living thing, that he recognizes the uniqueness of life.

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[1] Not however in Great Britain. ('Enquiry' is the original meaning of the word *historia*.)—Translator.

Aristotle found great enjoyment in the study of animal species. He has given the main reason for his enthusiasm.

> . . . *If some have no graces to charm the sense* [*he writes*], *yet even these, by disclosing to intellectual perception the artistic spirit that designed them, give immense pleasure to all who can trace links of causation, and are inclined to philosophy. Every realm of nature is marvellous: and as Heraclitus, when the strangers who came to visit him found him warming himself at the furnace in the kitchen and hesitated to go in, is reported to have bidden them not to be afraid to enter, as even in the kitchen divinities were present, so we should venture on the study of every kind of animal without distaste; for each and all will reveal to us something natural and something beautiful. Absence of haphazard and conduciveness of everything to an end are to be found in Nature's works in the highest degree, and the resultant end of her generations and combinations is a form of the beautiful.*
>
> *If any person thinks the examination of the rest of the animal kingdom an unworthy task, he must hold in like disesteem the study of man. For no one can look at the primordia of the human frame—blood, flesh, bones, vessels, and the like—without much repugnance.*[1]

Finality, 'conduciveness of everything to an end': need we remind the reader what Aristotle means by this? He thinks that every being and every organ have been created by nature for some *end*, some special purpose: that he calls a final cause. Nature, he says, has her plan; to discover that purpose, that final cause of living beings, is to rediscover at every moment the beauty of the world—that is what completes his joy.

As a philosopher, a savant, he does guard against the abuse of final causes. There are cases where he refuses the facile solution of a finalistic explanation, and substitutes one drawn from mechanistic causality. 'Zeus', he writes, 'does not send rain to make the corn grow, but by necessity; for vapour after rising must cool, and, when cooled, must turn to water and fall.' Democritus could not have put it better.

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At the same time, the almost overweening enthusiasm that I have described, his burning interest in all natural things, and his almost fraternal love for animals and the animal nature of man, led Aristotle to attempt an enormous positive undertaking—that of cataloguing every living thing, showing the finality immanent in them and their constitution, and finally classing them in an order of ascent leading to Man.

This task was too gigantic to be accomplished without some slips, even apart from the philosophic interpretation he gives to the action of Nature, which, however fertile in beauties, is of course imaginary—though we must note that finalism still exists among scientists in our era, and it is scarcely possible to deny its usefulness, if only as a method of research. But at the moment I am speaking only of factual errors: modern authors point them out, always the same ones, in pitying or disdainful tones. A dozen of them are quite surprising—yes, a dozen; out of the thousands of observations, in a field where Aristotle was advancing like an explorer over an immense unknown continent, the world of living organisms, a world more immense and inaccessible than that of Jules Verne's unsurpassed imagination.

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[1] *The Parts of Animals* 645a 5–30 (*Works*, edited and translated J. A. Smith and W. D. Ross, Oxford, Clarendon Press, Vol. V, 1912).

Thus, he maintains with great seriousness that women have fewer teeth than men, or that man has only eight pairs of ribs, except for the Ligurians who have to make do with seven. Be it noted that he has not said whether he counts the floating ribs in with the others, nor whether we are to count as one or several the ribs which are joined together at the sternum.

Some more mistakes.—He did not succeed in distinguishing the bones of the human cranium or find the sutures; he counts three bones in the male cranium and only one, which he says is circular, in that of women. He thinks the arteries are full of air; he thinks the brain is cold. He thinks man has only one lung. He knows almost nothing about the nervous system. In general too, he knows man much less well than animals. It is true that he had never dissected humans, apart from a few embryos, whereas he had dissected animals of about fifty species. (Thus we see in his treatment of the mole that he had removed the thick skin over the normal place of the eye and had recognized all the essential parts of the organ—pupil, iris, cornea, as well as the duct leading from eye to encephalon.)

The mistakes are astonishing, let us admit. The naturalist is often hasty; where he should have made repeated observations and checks, he has sometimes trusted most unreliable sources (which are not always extant today). But also he will sometimes correct his own statements from one work to another; thus, after stating in the *Researches on Animals* that the crocodile has no tongue (on the authority of Herodotus, unverified), he reopens the question in the *Parts of Animals*, admits that it has a tongue after all, and explains by building on another mistake of Herodotus how the mistake is possible.

Here is another and more considerable correction, concerning the fertilization of oviparous fishes. In the *Researches* Aristotle had maintained very strange theories on this point, which were however only a repetition of unanimous contemporary beliefs.

In the case of oviparous fishes the process of coition is less open to observation. In *point of fact, some are led by the want of actual observation to surmise that the female becomes impregnated by swallowing the seminal fluid of the male. And there can be no doubt that this proceeding on the part of the female is often witnessed; for at the rutting season the females follow the males and perform this operation, and strike the males with their mouths under the belly, and the males are thereby induced to part with the sperm sooner and more plentifully. And, further, at the spawning season the males go in pursuit of the females, and, as the female spawns, the males swallow the eggs; and the species is continued in existence by the spawn that survives this process. On the coast of Phoenicia they take advantage of these instinctive propensities of the two sexes to catch both one and the other: that is to say, by using the male of the grey mullet as a decoy they collect and net the female, and by using the female, the male.*

The repeated observation of this phenomenon has led to the notion that the process was equivalent to coition, but the fact is that a similar phenomenon is observable in quadrupeds. For at the rutting seasons both the males and the females take to running at their genitals, and the two sexes take to smelling each other at those parts.

With partridges, by the way, if the female gets to leeward of the male, she becomes thereby impregnated. And often when they happen to be in heat she is affected in this wise by the voice of the male, or by his breathing down on her as he flies overhead; and by the way, both the male and the female partridge keep the mouth wide open and protrude the tongue in the process of coition.[1]

(The last paragraph has been considered an interpolation by several moderns, because it interrupts the thread of the argument.)

But in a later work, the *Generation of Animals*, Aristotle's views have entirely changed. Here, the opinion just quoted is held by the writer to be 'a foolish old tradition' showing great 'inability to reflect', and 'superficial attention to the facts' (these expressions are translated from Aristotle). Severely criticizing his own earlier observations, he goes on: the circumstances of the reproduction of fishes are, by virtue of their rapidity, so difficult to perceive that fishermen themselves have made mistakes and given currency to absolute fables. They did not observe with 'care to discover truly'; hence 'these incorrect and ridiculous statements'.

Elsewhere we meet the hyena and the badger, said by public opinion to be hermaphrodite; the crow, jay and dove, which copulate by the beak, the weasel, by the mouth—giving birth by the same orifice! Aristotle does not take long to show with complete precision what does take place. 'The difficulty is solved', he concludes simply, 'if we watch carefully.'

These examples show that though Aristotle, like Herodotus before him, may sometimes give way to a taste for the picturesque, more often he prefers the higher pleasure of relating nothing but the truth.

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[1] *History of Animals* V 5, 541a 10–30, trans. cited.

For the rest, most of his mistakes are due to the unbridled lust for knowledge that possesses him. He had not yet learned that science is long and must be patient and prudent. His impetuosity is at once a help and a hindrance: without it, science might have died before its birth; with it, science sometimes trips up, though sometimes it overtakes the truth.

Sometimes too the cause of his error lies in an *a priori* assumption which he owes to the science (or the ignorance) of his time and has not troubled to test and refute by more minute observation. This will explain the statement that the arteries (the aorta, for instance) contain air—the statement was continually made by almost all Greek medical science, by common belief, and by terminology, which made the trachea an artery, and the most important of all. It was an assumption which could not even be upset by the obvious fact that blood spurts from arterial wounds. To deny this fact—which disturbed them—the physicians of the time invented the existence of channels of communication between veins and arteries, and accepted the explanation that when the blood was no longer compressed by air it passed from the former to the latter, in accordance with the theory that nature abhors a vacuum. So strong, on even the greatest of minds, is the influence of a universal error.

If Aristotle's mistakes surprise us, let us not forget that they are minute in comparison with the multitude of new knowledge, of discoveries, that he lavished on humanity.

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The force, variety and accuracy of his observations still astonish scientists today. Though anxious for information about exotic animals, Aristotle is more interested in those he can observe at close quarters. It would be impossible, for example, to praise too highly his description of the complex stomach of ruminants, with their chambers, not one of which he fails to mention. He also investigates the circulatory system of animals—heart and blood-vessels—distinguishing the aorta from the vena cava. Again, he gives a correct idea of the respiratory structures, lungs and gills. All these organs are treated in a relatively detailed style, which denotes first-hand acquaintance in the author. But his greatest attention is given to the structure of the genital organs in both sexes. In this field his investigations, without making us forget the descriptions of the Hippocratic school, show an exceptional competence, which is once again visible in his last biological work, the *Generation of Animals*.

Aristotle also studies the development of the embryo with the greatest attention.

Day after day he observed the development of the chick in the egg. On the fourth day he saw a red speck appear in the white, and the speck began to beat like a heart—it was a heart, the heart of the unborn chick. Here is the page on the incubation of the bird.

With the common hen after three days and three nights there is the first indication of the embryo. Meanwhile the yolk comes into being, rising towards the sharp end, where the primal element of the egg is situated, and where the egg gets hatched; and the heart appears, like a speck of blood, in the white of the egg. This point beats and moves as though endowed with life, and from it two vein-ducts with blood in them trend in a convoluted course and a membrane carrying bloody fibres now envelopes the yolk, leading off from the vein-ducts. A little afterwards the body is differentiated, at first very small and white. The head is clearly distinguished, and in it the eyes, swollen out to a great extent. This condition of the eyes lasts on for a good while, as it is only by degrees that they diminish in size and collapse. At the outset the under portion of the body appears insignificant in comparison with the upper portion. Of the two ducts that lead from the heart, the one proceeds towards the circumjacent integument, and the other, like a navel-string, towards the yolk. The life-element of the chick is the white of the egg, and the nutriment comes through the navel-string out of the yolk.

About the twentieth day, if you open the egg and touch the chick, it moves inside and chirps; and it is already coming to be covered with down, when, after the twentieth day is past, the chick begins to break the shell. The head is situated over the right leg close to the flank, and the wing is placed over the head. By and by the yolk, diminishing gradually in size, at length becomes entirely used up and comprehended within the chick (so that, ten days after hatching, if you cut open the chick, a small remnant of the yolk is still left in connexion with the gut), but it is detached from the navel, and there is nothing in the interval between, but it has been used up entirely. During this period above referred to the chick sleeps, wakes up, makes a move and looks up and chirps; and the heart and the navel together palpitate as though the creature were respiring.[1]

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As the son of the most seafaring of peoples, Aristotle has given particular attention to fish and molluscs—presumably while he was living on Lesbos, with fishermen who brought him what they caught and let him dissect it or watch it alive.

I shall give two particularly good examples, in which certain statements of the Stagirite, after being judged fanciful or false, have been demonstrated centuries later to be perfectly correct. Aristotle says that in the Smooth Dogfish the female appears to deposit eggs in its own body, the eggs being attached to a sort of placenta in the body of the parent. Modern naturalists did not spare their jeers for this 'invention', until the day when the great German physiologist Johannes Müller showed—in the middle of the nineteenth century—that Aristotle's analysis had been right. Again, speaking of a fish found in the Acheloüs, the *silure glanis*, Aristotle said that when the female has laid her eggs in a spot which is generally surrounded by plants or other obstacles, she goes away and the male stands guard over the eggs to prevent the other fish approaching them. Its vigil lasts from forty to fifty days, until the young fish have left the eggs and grown big enough to defend themselves against their enemies. This passage caused much laughter at the expense of Aristotle's simplicity. However, the Swiss scientist Louis Agassiz, who had read Aristotle, happened to discover in the rivers of America silurids which guard their eggs just like the *glanis* of the Acheloüs. But the work of Agassiz did not receive the notice it deserved, and it was not till 1906 that Aristotle received justice. The fish was then named *Para-silurus Aristotelis*.[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, VI 3, 561a 5–562a 20.

It may also be mentioned that Aristotle discovered a remarkable fact about the copulation of cephalopods, which was not rediscovered until the nineteenth century. It was not until the same century that his observations on the nests made by catfish were recognized to be true.

He describes the characteristics of certain molluscs with striking exactness. The octopus, cuttlefish and squid are most judiciously compared and distinguished. He describes in abundant detail the general organization which they have in common—the existence of particular special structures, the pouch, the mantle, and the small fins; the head placed between the abdomen and the feet; the tentacular nature of these feet, which play the part of hands furnished with suckers; the digestive tube curved in the form of a V (so that the anus is next to the mouth!); and finally the curious characteristic that they emit a sort of ink to make the water opaque and enable themselves to escape in case of danger (what an example of teleology!). Ink is the favourite weapon of the cuttlefish, while the octopus takes advantage of its power to change the colour of its skin.

At the other end of the animal scale, Aristotle gives an interesting and quite detailed portrait of the ape. It is a portrait made with reference to man, its nearest relation in the animal family; differences and resemblances are accurately indicated.

Its face resembles that of man in many respects; in other words, it has similar nostrils and ears, and teeth like those of man, both front teeth and molars. Further, whereas quadrupeds in general are not furnished with lashes on one of the two eyelids, this creature has them on both, only very thinly set, especially the under ones; in fact

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[1] A documentary film has been made of this story, and the public of Lausanne has been able to see silurids guarding their eggs (Author's note).

> *they are very insignificant indeed. And we must bear in mind that all other quadrupeds have no under eyelash at all.*
>
> *The ape has also arms like man, only covered with hair, and it bends these legs like man, with the convexities of both limbs facing one another. In addition, it has hands and fingers and nails like man, only that all these parts are somewhat more beast-like in appearance. Its feet are exceptional in kind. That is, they are like large hands, and the toes are like fingers, with the middle one the longest of all, and the under part of the foot is like a hand except for its length, and stretches out towards the extremities like the palm of the hand; and this palm at the after end is unusually hard, and in a clumsy obscure kind of way resembles a heel.*

Aristotle also points out what makes the erect posture difficult for the ape—the fact that 'its upper part is much larger than its lower part, as is the case with quadrupeds', and that 'its feet resemble hands, and are composed in a manner of hands and feet'; so that 'the animal is oftener to be found on all fours than upright'.[1]

We could go on endlessly; on animals the naturalist seems as prolific as Nature herself. We must come to man and end this section with him.

Man, alone among the animals, possesses the divine prerogative of intelligence; but the cleavage on this point between him and the animals is not clear-cut; certain animals have what Aristotle calls 'traces' or 'imitations' of human psychology, and in particular of the mental processes. It is, then, the human phenomenon as a whole that he seeks to put back in the animal context, including intelligence, which is divine. In this way the unity of the animal family, the unity of biology, will not be broken.

Man alone enjoys intelligence fully. Alone, too, among animals, he stands erect. The naturalist indicates the connexion between the two facts.

> *Of all animals man alone stands erect, in accordance with his god-like nature and essence. For it is the function of the god-like to think and to be wise; and no easy task were this under the burden of a heavy body, pressing down from above and obstructing by its weight the motions of the intellect and of the general sense. When, moreover, the weight and corporeal substance become excessive, the body must of necessity incline towards the ground. In such cases therefore nature, in order to give support to the body, has replaced the arms and hands by forefeet. . . . Such an animal becomes a quadruped, its body inclining downwards in front from the weight which its soul* [*its life-force*] *cannot sustain.*[2]

So the erect posture is the sign as well as the condition of thought. Animals, for their part, are 'as it were always recumbent'!

As we have seen, Aristotle puts back intelligence itself among the general characteristics of life. He shows it as related to the bodily structure of living things. As J. M. Le Blond[1] writes, he shows the animal as coming nearer to intelligence the further it is from the ground (and vice versa)—first crawling, then supporting itself on its four limbs, finally having contact only with two feet. We find in the *Parts of Animals* a striking passage on the drop in intelligence and the descent of life towards the ground as we move from bipeds to quadrupeds, then to polypods and apods, till we reach the point where the order found in man is reversed and the animal loses its power of sensation and 'becomes a plant' in Aristotle's phrase, its roots, which are organs of nutrition, being placed lowest, contrary to what is found in the erect posture, and the 'head' of the plant being sunk in earth: with the loss of sensation comes the total extinction of intelligence.

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[1] *Ibid.*, II 8, 502a 25–b 21.

[2] *Parts of Animals* IV 10, 686a 25–b 1, trans. cited.

Here is the end of the passage.

> *... By further small successions of change, they come to have their principal organ below; and at last their cephalic part becomes motionless and destitute of sensation. Thus the animal becomes a plant, that has its upper parts downwards and its lower parts above. For in plants the roots are the equivalents of mouth and head, while the seed has an opposite significance, for it is produced above at the extremities of the twigs.*
>
> *The reasons have now been stated why some animals have many feet, some only two, and others none; why, also, some living things are plants and others animals; and, lastly, why man alone of all animals stands erect.*[2]

In his study of man, Aristotle also points out the relation which exists between man's hand, his intelligence and his life. He writes:

> *Much in error, then, are they who say that the construction of man is not only faulty, but inferior to that of all other animals; seeing that he is, as they point out, barefooted, naked, and without weapon of which to avail himself. For other animals have each but one mode of defence, and this they can never change; so that they must perform all the offices of life and even, so to speak, sleeep with sandals on, never laying aside what serves as a protection to their bodies, nor changing such single weapon as they may chance to possess. But to man numerous modes of defence are open, and these, moreover, he may change at will; as also he may adopt such weapon as he pleases, and at such times as suit him. For the hand is talon, hoof, and horn, at will. So, too, it is spear, and sword, and whatsoever other weapon or instrument you please; for all these can it be from its power of grasping and holding them all.*[3]

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[1] See Bibliography. The following passage is taken in substance from M. le Blond's Introduction, *Aristote, philosophe de la vie*, p. 40 (Author's note).

[2] *Ibid.*, 686b 30–687a 5, trans. cited.

[3] *Ibid.*, 687a 20–b 5, trans. cited.

Aristotle, as I have said, has collected facts by the thousand. He is a man curious to study all living things, a man as much drawn to the ordinary as to the strange. But above all he is a scientist; that is to say, that he collects these facts in order to compare them, to try to discover laws, to think out a picture of Nature.

The originality of Aristotelian biology lies in the perpetual comparisons between the facts collected. They are founded on an explicit theory of *analogy*—Aristotle notes any analogy of structure, for which he also uses the term homology.[1] To take an instance—the fish's scale is the bird's feather, or the quadruped's hair. But above all he points out analogies of function. His principal biological works (the *Parts of Animals* and *Generation of Animals*) are synthesized accounts of one given function in the various species. For example, digestion. Aristotle builds up the whole animal around its alimentary canal, representing it diagrammatically—the sanguineous animal, the most perfect, is figured as a vertical line: on top the mouth, then the oesophagus, then the stomach, the intestine and at the base the anus. But in molluscs a broken circle seems to replace the straight line, and the anus tends to be close to the mouth. In plants, as we have seen, nature reverts to the straight line, but inverted.

Aristotle shows the transition that leads from one form of animal life to the next, as he shows it between plants and animals. He writes:

> *We may see in plants a continuous ascent towards animal life. In the same way it is difficult to decide whether certain marine organisms are plants or animals. The entire scale of animal life is composed of fine gradations of vitality and mobility.*

Plants themselves are so to speak a stage of life between inanimate things and animals, which, for their part, possess life in its fullest form.

> *The Ascidians differ but slightly from plants, and yet have more of an animal nature than the sponges, which are virtually plants and nothing more. For nature passes from lifeless objects to animals in such unbroken sequence, interposing between them beings which live and yet are not animals.*[2]

So there is continuity in nature—a continuity which is not inert, but an *ascent* (Aristotle's own expression), up through animal life towards men. But Aristotle, as we have seen in the passages already quoted, does not always see the progression of life as a rise, but sometimes in terms of a descent. 'The animal becomes a plant,' as he has written.

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[1] Strictly the term *analogy* should refer to similarity of function without common origin (as between scales and hair), *homology* to similarity traceable to common origin (as between fins and legs)—Translator.

[2] *Ibid.*, IV 5, 681a 10, trans. cited.

These texts and some others make it appear that Aristotle had inklings of a transformist interpretation of nature. Yet elsewhere he states quite explicitly his belief in the fixity of species. We must not expect him to disentangle the extremely tangled skein he has brought together; let us note merely that he does sometimes wander, in spite of his theories, towards conceptions which are clearly transformist. At such times, he shows animal species as rough sketches and partial failures of nature in her gropings towards man. But after the failure she starts work again, and invents new species.

It is incontestable that there are expressions perpetually recurring in his biological works, in which Aristotle endows Nature with personality, and makes of her an intelligent cosmic force, providing each species with the most harmonious possible constitution, instituting harmony of activities between species, and through each species, by a continuous ascent, working towards the perfection of man.[1] One sentence in particular is always recurring, in forms which are almost identical: 'Nature does nothing without purpose.' This is the principle he invokes all the time to explain the conformation of this or that organ in each species. He finds himself speaking of a nature which is 'purposive', 'inventive', 'ingenious', a nature that 'wills', and 'looks towards' the goal to be attained. Nature is, then, not a creative force, but simply 'makes the best' of conditions as she finds them. Nature is not God; she is the impulse in individuals, the up-surge of growth, that responds to the attraction of God.

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But the effort of synthesis manifested in this conception of 'Nature the organizer' is also manifested, in the highest degree, in the classification of animal species.

As a matter of fact, we find no final classification in Aristotle's biological writings. He realized what difficulties it involved. However he has left the main lines of the classification in his mind pretty clearly indicated, and it is sound enough to have stood the test of time. Nothing of the kind had been attempted before him, and after him we must wait for Linnaeus before we can mark any further progress.

The two broadest groups in his classification are those of sanguineous and bloodless animals, corresponding to the division into vertebrates and non-vertebrates in modern science. Within the sanguineous (or vertebrate) group, he distinguishes primarily four genera—viviparous quadrupeds, oviparous quadrupeds, birds and fish. But at this point he encounters strange creatures which are fish and not fish at the same time: what shall he do with whales and dolphins? They are aquatic, and swim like fish; they have all the external appearance of fish—but they have no gills. They have one curious organ, a blow-hole, which

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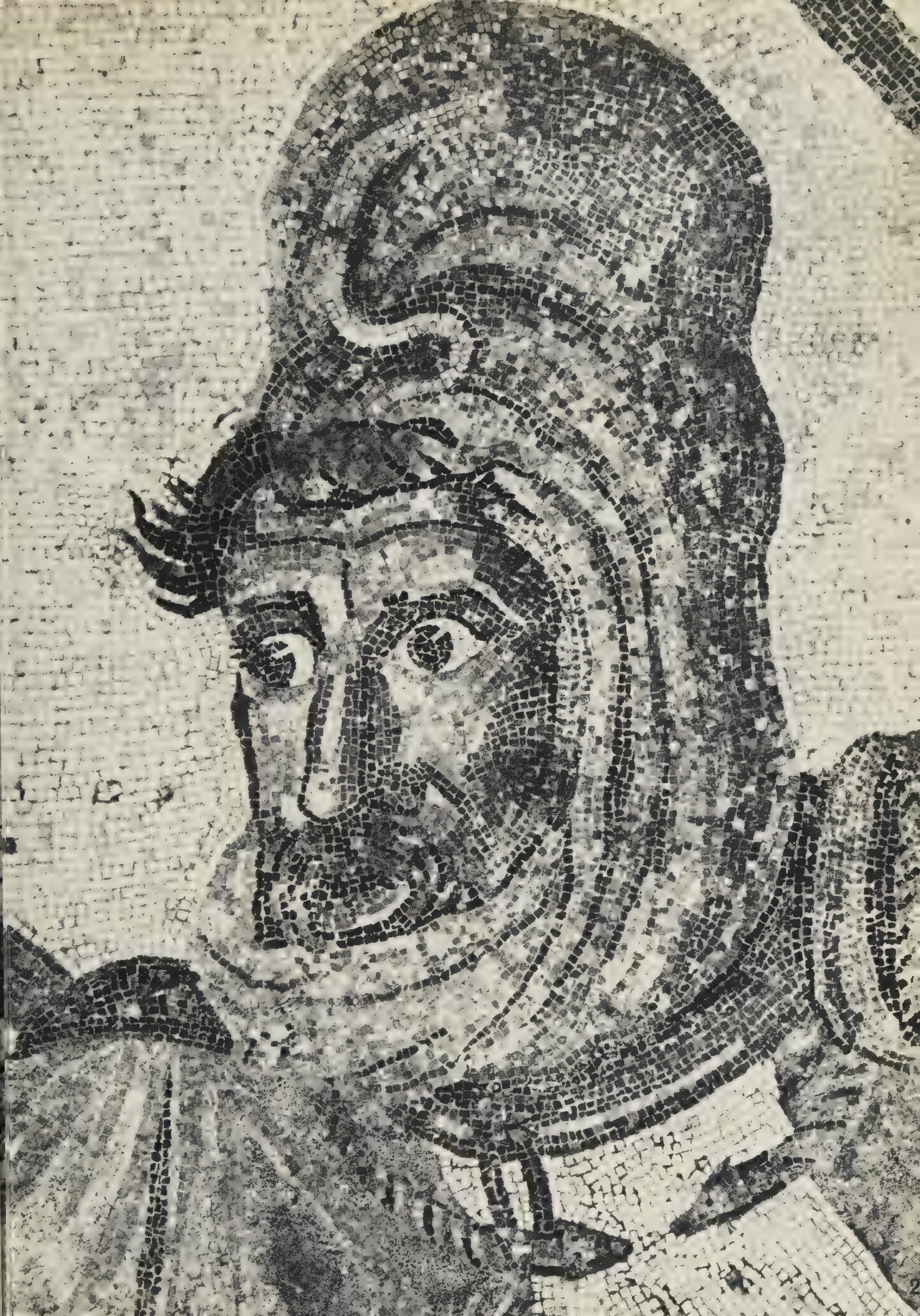
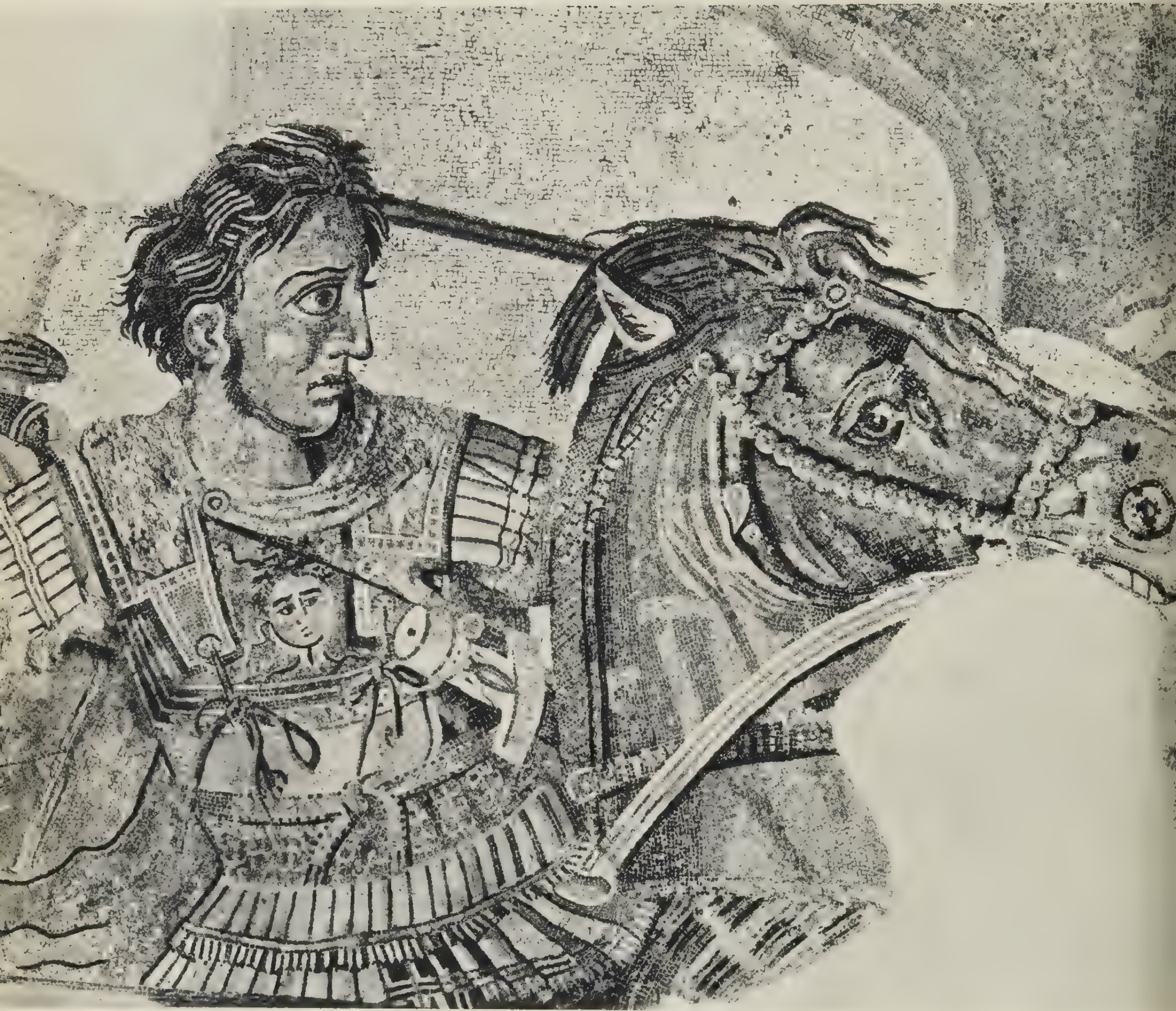
[1] Cf. Le Blond, op. cit., p. 46 (Author's note).

21. *Battle of Arbela: Darius in battle against Alexander. Mosaic from Pompeii*





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seems to be connected with their respiratory system and puzzles Aristotle greatly; he returns to it more than once, and in the end discovers its function. But also, these aquatic animals do not lay eggs like fish, but give birth like mammals to living offspring, which they suckle, for they have mammary glands. Finally the naturalist decides to place these odd, almost unnatural creatures in a separate genus: they are cetaceans (from *kêtos*, an old poetic term for sea-monster). This was a remarkable decision, especially if we remember that every other naturalist, up to the sixteenth century and later, deemed whales and dolphins to be good honest fish. The fine *Notes sur l'Histoire des Animaux* by Camus, produced in 1783, after Linnaeus, does not know which side to take in this question, and seems to fear that Aristotle was wrong in excluding the cetaceans from the fish class.

This was the sort of difficulty that Aristotle had to surmount in his tentative classification; he solved them successfully, and without complicated terminology. Another example is the bat: what is he to do with it? It flies: is it a bird? But it has membraneous hairy wings, so at once he calls it a quadruped, adding 'an imperfect one'; in the end he will not put it among the birds; it has teeth too! It is simply a flying mammal. As for the seal, in spite of its fin-like flippers, it is classed—and this time with no hesitation—among the four-footed vivipara.

So, as we see, Aristotle can put his finger at once on the species that upset an over-simplified classification. His treatment of them generally corresponds, without fuss or use of jargon, with the scientific classification of modern times—which, of course, is clearer thanks to its exact vocabulary. But Aristotle was the first to bring up and solve the problems posed by the great complexity of animal life at its higher level of development—where it already possesses a certain relative clarity.

For the world of bloodless, invertebrate animals with its huge population, no perfect classification can be found at first glance. Aristotle divides it into four principal genera, distinguished according to their methods of reproduction—crustacea, molluscs, insects and testacea. The first two are viviparous; insects undergo metamorphoses; and the reproduction of testaceans (snails, sea-urchins, etc.) is difficult to establish—many are born, so Aristotle thought, by spontaneous generation.

Apart from the principal genera, he notes certain types of living things which do not fit the categories he has set up, and display one characteristic in common, different as they are from one another—the fact that they form a transition between animal and plant. Such are ascidians, which are fixed to the ground; sponges, which at first sight are so remote from animal structure; and sea-anemones and starfish, which can move but have altogether peculiar organic structures. Here Aristotle seems to forestall the views of certain moderns, and open avenues of

22. *Battle of Arbela: Alexander in battle against Darius. Mosaic from Pompeii*

research on a vast world, guessed at rather than methodically explored by him—the world of 'zoophytes', half plant, half animal, in which life trembles on the brink before deciding to learn to move.

We must not disguise the fact that this summary of Aristotelian classifications has been reduced to scandalous brevity. The scientist-philosopher is really far richer and far more flexible than it is possible to show him here. Let us at least make amends for the injustice done to him through this simplification, by recalling the judgment of the greatest of modern biologists. 'Linnaeus and Cuvier have been my two gods,' writes Darwin, 'though in very different ways, but they were mere schoolboys to old Aristotle.'

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The incredible labours of this indefatigable observer; the vast scope of the 'team-work' which he set up in his school (and such work is indispensable in any wide-ranging scientific research); the strictness of his method, proclaiming the great principle that 'there is no science but of the general'; lastly the genius shown in many of the syntheses he put forward—all these things make Aristotle the undisputed founder of biology, 'the science of living things'.

He gave it to the ancient world, but it was a world too young as yet to grasp its value and carry it forward (consider Pliny, for all his picturesqueness); in reality it was the modern world that took this discovery from his hands. Equally with the budding science of mathematics and the immemorial science of astronomy, it was an unsurpassed expression of the scientific genius of antiquity, or rather of that ancient faculty proper to mankind in general—that of surveying and mastering the natural world.

But is 'mastering' quite the right word? No. At first sight Aristotle may appear as the pure authentic descendant of Odysseus, that 'wily and most intelligent maker of devices'; like him, it is true, he seeks to know in all their forms the animals and plants of the living universe—in order to arrange them, each in its place, in the showcases of science where everything is so clear that there is no more need to be afraid. But if he does this, it is not for the sake of mastering them, still less of using them; but simply (what means much more to him) of *contemplating* them, and contemplating them in their relationship with the eternal beings on which they depend.

The animal and vegetable worlds are marvellous to study in their finely coordinated complexity; but Aristotle has no intention of forgetting or letting us forget that this, which he calls the sublunary world, is subject to coming to being and passing away—it does not possess existence in the fullest sense, and remains subjected to the laws of the revolution of the heavenly bodies. These are 'divine beings', 'eternal beings'; Aristotle has more than once proclaimed that to contemplate them fills the human soul with joy far more than those more exact scientific researches which he carried on and described so enthusiastically.

It is clear enough that it is not the savant speaking now, but the philosopher. We may regret that this philosophy, in the name of dedication to the quest of the imperishable and divine, helps to turn science towards a contemplation which necessarily remains inert, a frozen state in which it can neither live nor develop.

But we need not regret. Scientific thought doubtless needed to lie fallow after the splendid start it had received in biology from Aristotle. From this rest—a rest of centuries—it drew the strength for another spurt.

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One more word. The reading of these biological works does not charm as did Plato. Aristotle is no magician of language, no poet, as, in the wider sense, his master had been. It is true that we have nothing of his but the notes he prepared for his esoteric lectures (those reserved for the more advanced disciples), or perhaps notes taken by students at these lectures and written up by them. However that may be, his style lacks mystery; its great merit is to be unrhetorical and a little austere, and to keep close to what it is describing. Thus stripped of ornament, his work does attract, and hold attention to a surprising degree, in the same way as reality itself observed and understood.

Aristotle is a powerful *realist*. In his works the reality of the animal world lives with an authentic life in all its variety—a life that no reader tires of experiencing. Most often it is an alien, inhuman life, but at the same time close and familiar because it shows us, in a body which is strange, that which is also the ultimate basis and the first rudiments of our own being—life, reproducing itself through desire, or feeling hunger and killing to assuage that hunger and subsist. So the animal life present in these pages, which at first seems so far removed, becomes strangely close to us as it teems around us. It speaks, in absolutely even tones, of what lies closest to our hearts, to our bellies—*life*, transient in each living thing, yet in a sense eternal in the prodigious multitudes that people the earth.

In a passage of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle shows wonder at what to us is a commonplace truth. 'The mere act of living,' he writes, 'appears to be shared even by plants.'[1] The philosopher seems struck in the first place by what unites man to the other beings in Nature, and the furthest removed, before being struck by what separates him. It means no more to him that reason is found in man alone, than that life is found both in man and plant. It is here primarily that Aristotle's humanism is shown; the manifold population of trees and beasts is in a way the

[1] I vii, translated by H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, 1926, p. 31.

brother of man, and it is this taste of fraternity that fills our mouths when we read the biological works.

Sometimes, too, the proximity of the animal world becomes still more human in another fashion. It experiences the most exalted of human sentiments—not only the most useful and the most necessary for the preservation of life, but at the same time the least tied to utility and the most gratuitous. The philosopher—or perhaps this time we should say the great *poet* of friendship—this Aristotle who, in speaking of man, says that 'friendship . . . is one of the most indispensable requirements of life' also says that affection is natural 'not only in man but also in birds and in most animals; as also is friendship between members of the same species; and this is especially strong in the human race'.[1]

Thus in its psychology as well as its physical make-up the animal is a first sketch for man. It might be said that it heralds man. Aristotle writes a remarkable page on the physical similarities between the two.

> *In the great majority of animals there are traces of psychical qualities or attitudes, which qualities are more markedly differentiated in the case of human beings. For just as we pointed out resemblances in the physical organs, so in a number of animals we observe gentleness or fierceness, mildness or cross temper, courage or timidity, fear or confidence, high spirit or low cunning, and, with regard to intelligence, something equivalent to sagacity.*

Later he adds, 'The truth of this statement' [that animals have states of mind which are rudimentary forms of those of the human race]

> *will be the more clearly apprehended if we have regard to the phenomena of childhood: for in children may be observed the traces and seeds of what will one day be settled psychological habits, though psychologically a child hardly differs for the time being from an animal; so that one is quite justified in saying that, as regards man and animals, certain psychical qualities are identical with one another, whilst others resemble, and others are analogous to, each other.*[2]

This is an astonishing passage, blazing the trail for every kind of comparative psychology and pointing out to science paths which it has not yet followed to the end. So the animal personality is more human than we first suspected; and this assertion balances and compensates the earlier one, that the physical nature of man is animal.

In the light of this double statement, our bonds of kinship and fraternity in nature with the world of herbs, flowers and trees, the world of birds, fish and beasts are drawn so close as to be indestructible.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 451–3.

[2] *History of Animals* VIII i, 588a 18–64, trans. cited.

The humanism of Aristotle is, in the last resort, this sense of the flooding, proliferating life which flows through the plant and the animal species, and through man in no way distinct from them, to lead the living Being onward into the light of reason.

◆

Only, is it true that the living universe has been presented to man for him to contemplate in rapt amazement? As we draw to an end, this doubt takes hold of us; and we wonder whether this contemplation was not the negation of Aristotelian biology.

CHAPTER NINE

ALEXANDER: THE VISION OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN

There are men (as I have said above, in different words) whose appearance in history seems to solve an insoluble problem, to break out of some dead-end where the march of events seemed halted in impotence and inertia, or to open up the way blocked by disorder and anarchy. Such men are the heralds and creators of a new future.

Alexander, in the highest degree, deserves to be numbered among such men.

That is why the myth-making imagination of the Greek people ascribes to him the cutting of the Gordian knot. The knot had defied the most patient and most skilful fingers: he did not trouble to break his nails untying it—he severed it with his sword. (Or, if anyone prefers to take this story as a true story rather than a myth, it is possible to accept that Alexander took literally the oracle promising the Empire of Asia to the man who should undo the Gordian knot, and, with a victorious gesture, made it apply to himself. Since then, he lived in the light of that prediction.)

The ancient Hellenic world was dying slowly, as the Greek city collapsed. Alexander did not attempt, after Plato, Aristotle and others, to shore up the glorious but decrepit edifices, or patch as best he could the garment that had grown too tight. At a single stroke his action—which was not made without thought—created for his successors a new fashion of gathering men together and governing communities—he invented the modern state under its ruler.

◎

His birth and origin foretold his character, his achievements and his meteoric destiny: for no man could have had a stranger couple for his parents.

His father Philip had conquered Athens, Demosthenes and Greece thanks to his acute mind and indomitable energy. He had the art of finding out and defeating the forces of his enemies with exact efficiency: the unexpectedness of his measures never failed to disconcert those who thought they best understood his plans. Aping now the Greek and now the Barbarian, he would subject his opponents in turn to the most wheedling (and treacherous) charm and the most blustering violence. Possessing the lofty talents of a great statesman, he was not above replacing them at times with the cunning of a savage; he loved to cloak himself, even without necessity, in impenetrable folds of duplicity, and then to stand forth again suddenly to the hypnotized Greeks as a ruler clothed in justice and generosity. His patience was no less surprising than the rapidity of his decisions; in his conquests he would wait quietly for the fruits of his diplomacy and dishonesty to ripen, until such time as he only had to gather them where they lay, scarcely bruised by their fall. No moral scruples hindered any action of his: he lied with gusto and broke his word with delight. His bravery and endurance would have been exceptional in the rank and file of his troops, and on all occasions he proved himself everything that their undying loyalty believed of him.

Out of this paternal legacy Alexander had made his own choice with great severity of judgment. He despised the low cunning of such political behaviour, and hated deceit, studying only 'to be on his guard against it'.

> *No cheat or liar ever caught him off his guard, and both his word and his bond were inviolable.*

These are the words of Arrian.[1] His only address was in 'his rapidity of movement' by means of which he could appear where it seemed impossible for him to be. He thought nothing of risking his all, for he was always certain of victory. Once he had marked out a goal he marched straight forward towards it, carried by the force of his own impetuosity.

He was not, like his father, all intelligence (plus sensuality: whereas Alexander, according to Arrian, was

> *most temperate in the pleasures of the body, his passion was for glory only, and in that he was insatiable*).[2]

He was the son of Philip, but even more the son of Olympias, the Epirot, a Maenad who gave herself to Dionysus in the frenzied exaltation of music and dancing, ecstasies beyond the ken of ordinary life.

He inherited from his father all the intellectual gifts of the great statesman and the outstanding soldier: but one thing placed him far above any of the great men of the past, Themistocles or Pericles, or Philip himself—the fact that these mental gifts were polarized by passion, directed and sustained by this force at their highest point of excellence. The intelligence of Olympias' son was not merely knowledge of those ways and means by which a project could be carried out, not merely light, but heat: like the heat of the sun, it had creative activity, and at times, destructive also like the sun, this intelligence infused with passion could burn and ravage like a fire.

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[1] Arrian; *Life of Alexander*, translated by Aubrey de Selincourt, Penguin Classics, 1958, p. 254.

[2] *Ibid.*

During his expedition, if we were to follow him step by step, we should see how Alexander, while no doubt imagining that he was carrying on his father's programme, extended it continually, saw it in a new light, and gave Philip's intentions, which had been merely political, an entirely different meaning—thereby disclosing the nature of his own genius. The work he endeavoured to achieve proved to be a very different thing from the building of an Empire on Philip's model; in the last analysis, as we shall see, it was the invention of a new world.

I do not intend to recapitulate the famous campaign, but only to emphasize certain episodes which seem, some to contradict and others to herald, that conception of brotherhood to which we shall come in the end—to which Alexander himself came late in his career. (But we remember that he died at less than thirty-three years of age.)

Before setting out to conquer his kingdom in Asia, Alexander took care to leave in his rear in Europe no enemy that was not convinced of his invincible strength. To the North, he crossed the Danube and burned a township taken at random, to persuade the Getan people, which was hostile, and the Scythian tribes, which caused him misgivings, of the redoubtable power of the kings of Macedonia. To the West, he hastily 'pacified' the turbulent Illyrians. In Greece, Thebes was already raising the standard of revolt, blockading in its citadel the garrison which was supposed to keep order for Macedonia, and Demosthenes, a little prematurely, was talking of the young king as a 'big booby'—Alexander in fact was already believed dead, sunk into the barbarian darkness or lost in the mists of the West—when suddenly he appeared out of the blue at the gates of the glorious rebel. Thebes was retaken in savage street-fighting. He ordered the city of Heracles and Dionysus to be razed to the ground, sparing only the house of the poet Pindar. He put the male population to the sword, and sold the survivors into slavery—thirty thousand human beings! A terrible vengeance, meant as a warning to the Athenians. They, in their craven fear, sent him an embassy to congratulate him on his safe return and the crushing of the Theban rising—of which Athens had been the real instigator! Meanwhile by the Greeks as a whole the sack of Thebes was felt as an abominable crime, an outrage against their civilization. It was as if Alexander wished to contradict in advance the over-idealized picture of himself that he was to create in the fabulous Orient. But Alexander had not as yet discovered himself.

It remains true that he always retained—as the Theban affair warns us—a considerable admixture of unbridled violence, whether he derived it from his passionate mother or his brutal father.

Thus the quiescence of Greece was ensured by terror for a long time to come—and better still, by the army of twelve thousand foot and five thousand horse left in Europe by Alexander under the command of the trusty Antipater.

The king crossed the Hellespont in the spring of 334. He was not only king of Macedonia, he had made the Assembly of the Greeks, summoned at Corinth, confirm him in the title already conceded to Philip, 'general in chief of the Hellenes, protector of Greece'. In this way he had given to the campaign now opening the character of a Greek expedition—a *revanche* for the Median wars.

To conquer or destroy an empire fifty times greater and twenty times more populous than his, Alexander took no more than some thirty thousand foot and five thousand cavalry, including one thousand eight hundred Macedonians, the flower of the nobility of the kingdom—also a corps of engineers, able to improvise siege material which no fortress could withstand. As he advanced this army was progressively replaced: the force that crossed the Hellespont was no longer recognizable in the one that crossed the Hindu Kush or conquered the Punjab. The weak point of the expedition was the fleet, of only sixty triremes. Athens was sulking and holding back—she had sent a mere twenty! The Persian fleet (and the Phoenician) dominated the waters of the Aegean, and it would not have been too difficult for it to carry the war into Greece (as the Great King thought of doing) and arouse the freshly occupied country against its new masters. It was to counter that possibility that Alexander planned his strategy.

To defend his empire against the minute forces that were attacking it, the Great King, Darius III, could call on vast armies, difficult to estimate, but sometimes twenty and sometimes fifty times more numerous than Alexander's. But numbers of troops do not mean much. Alexander had absolute certainty in his victory; and from the first engagement he managed to inspire it in his troops. Darius was a brave soldier, not without military sense, but he was only energetic in fits, and had very little political wisdom. His kingdom was already falling to pieces; he let his satraps defend themselves each in his own fashion, and let the gangrene of treason spread over the great body of the Empire.

The first encounter took place (in 334) on the banks of the Granicus, where the Persian army awaited Alexander after he had piously recalled memories of Ilium.[1] It was less a battle planned by a strategist than a series of single combats fought by Alexander after the fashion of his ancestor Achilles. The reckless valour of the new

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[1] Alexander saw himself as the avenger of his ancestor Achilles (Translator).

'son of Peleus', plain for all to see with his white plumes and gleaming shield, was enough to put the Persian army to rout. Alexander gathered up, among many others, three hundred shields which he sent to Athens with an inscription which was insulting to Sparta. As he moved forward, most of the Greek cities of Asia Minor began to surrender; the few that resisted were quickly subdued.

As much and more than the martial dash that won Granicus, it was the reflective wisdom of a statesman, joined with the most sincere piety, which influenced Alexander in settling the fate of each of the conquered cities. The conditions he imposed were not those of a liberator, but rather those of a patcher-up of old quarrels which meant nothing to him. Generally he took power away from oligarchies and replaced them by a popular government; and over the government he set up he put the authority, not as before of a Persian satrap, but of a Macedonian governor—never that of a Greek. The liberties of the old cities were thus only established under the control of Macedonia, and in the last resort of Alexander himself. We are still far from the 'fusion' of Greeks and Barbarians which later was the overruling thought of the king.

Sometimes even, the resistance of certain of the Greek cities seemed to awaken his savagery. Miletus, the celebrated port of a hundred warehouses which once had made the Greek tongue heard from Naucratis in Egypt to the end of the Black Sea, transported merchandise from Colchis to the Aegean and Sicily, and brought races together through commerce and hope of gain—Miletus was made to learn by the massacre let loose in its streets by the Macedonian soldiery, that men did not resist Alexander, and that those who wished to survive must entreat his 'pardon'. The fate of Halicarnassus was even worse: the city was razed, the population massacred or 'displaced'. . . .

In spite of all, a new note was heard during this military 'excursion' interspersed with moments of bloodshed down the coast of Asia Minor. An effervescence of revival took hold of the liberated cities—nowhere with more lively joy than at Sardis and Ephesus. In a number of places Alexander restored old temples, dedicated new ones, opened public games, led a procession, or restored their ancient privileges to decayed cities. These old ports, in which for centuries Europe had mixed with Asia and Hellas with the Barbarian, were beginning to turn into a fact that friendship between peoples, that Stoic ideal of 'concord' which was in truth to be Alexander's own particular dream. But it was a dream that he had not yet discovered.

A second time the Persian army tried to halt his march. Darius in person led it. He had brought together great forces—six hundred thousand men, so Arrian, our best source, cautiously suggests; but what was the use of that inchoate mass, except to hamper the leader who tried to command it?

The battle of Issus (333) was won by Alexander in a tract hemmed in between sea and mountains. He countered the threat of encirclement by an unexpected offensive and led his cavalry at the gallop over the river separating the two camps in a furious dash aimed straight at Darius, whom he had sighted in the centre. Darius soon turned his chariot in flight; after that the battle was a rout and a stampede.

The Persian army was crushed—a hundred thousand soldiers were massacred. Among the prisoners were the mother and wife of the Great King, his two daughters and the infant heir-apparent, all valuable hostages; the Macedonians also laid hands on immense treasure. Alexander treated his captives like a knight of legend, courteously aloof. The Great King's wife was said to be the most beautiful woman in Asia—the Macedonian prince did not honour her with a glance. We have come far from the Achilles of the *Iliad* who gambles his life and his all on 'fair Briseis', the captive maiden 'of the lovely cheeks'.

Issus opened up two avenues of advance to the victor—one, north-eastwards, towards the capitals of the East, by which he could easily overtake Darius and deal him a mortal blow; the other southwards, towards Syria and Egypt. He chose the second, which would restore him the freedom of the seas, prevent the enemy from taking the war into Greece, and confine him permanently to the lands of Asia proper. On this occasion Alexander made the less spectacular and less romantic choice, but the only safe one.

He entered Syria, then Phoenicia, ignoring Darius and his plans for the moment. He received the submission of several ports, among them Sidon. Tyre, which had the reputation of being impregnable, refused to admit him to her island bastion. Alexander, impatient though he was by nature, took his time: under the missiles of the enemy fleet and the besieged army, he built a long mole, five hundred metres long, which was several times destroyed but eventually joined Tyre to the mainland; then he brought up machines and gave the assault on the city walls, himself mounting the breach. Tyre fell in August 332, after holding out seven months.

Under the walls of the defiant city, Alexander had received an embassy from the Great King. Darius addressed him as King, as he had demanded earlier on; and Alexander replied to him as an equal, assembling the Counsel of Hetairoi, a high Macedonian institution, to hear his propositions. The scene was not without its grandeur: it is reported with sobriety by Arrian, the most careful and least expansive of our sources.

The ambassadors spoke. They offered in their master's name half the Persian Empire, from the Greek sea to the Euphrates, ten thousand talents (£2,400,000, gold) for the princesses' ransom, the hand of the king's eldest daughter for Alexander, with his alliance and his friendship! In the silence that followed, Parmenio, an old general of Philip's, realizing how much these offers exceeded all that Philip's ambition had ever hoped for, declared that the moment had come to make peace, and that it would be wise to seize it. He ended, 'I would accept, if I were Alexander.' His master let fall the cutting retort, 'So would I, if I were Parmenio.'

Before leaving Tyre, Alexander celebrated another solemn sacrifice to Heracles, the ancestor whose succession he was claiming in the East as in the West. The Tyrian Heracles was not simply a man who finally came to be a god after a life filled with ordeals and exploits in the service of men, but a god by birth and nature—the god Melkart—possessed of the divine prerogatives in their plenitude from all eternity. This was the Heracles to whom Alexander sacrificed and with whom he claimed kinship. For had he not already asked himself the question, himself astonished by his own genius, whether he was not an authentic son of Zeus?

He went his way southward, and met no further resistance except at Gaza, the most important city in Palestine. Gaza had been given as governor by Darius a black eunuch named Batis, who organized, with the help of the population, a ferocious resistance against the invader. Alexander replied by a strenuous siege which lasted more than two months. Once taken, he gave the town over to bloodshed, sold the women and children as slaves and put the men to the sword. As for the black governor, he had his heels pierced and dragged him round the city, howling with pain, behind his victorious chariot, while his men shouted for joy. (This story is found only in the late writer Quintus Curtius, a historian enamoured of the picturesque, from whom I have borrowed little in these pages.)

In December 332 Alexander arrived in Egypt. Immediately he showed the greatest respect for the divinities of the country. The fervent religious faith that filled him found its perfect justification in this land with a religion thousands of years old. Here he felt at home at once. The Persian conqueror Cambyses had stupidly wounded the divine bull Apis, Artaxerxes had slaughtered it in order to appropriate its sanctuaries. Very different was Alexander's attitude: he sacrificed, according to the Egyptian rite, to the bull-god at a temple in Memphis, as well as to other gods whom the resident Greeks assimilated to gods of Greece. These ceremonies did much to win over the priests, for only Pharaoh in principle was entitled to sacrifice in this way. We should not look on this as political calculation in Alexander, nor as an expression of tolerance: his soul was too deeply religious to stop at 'tolerating' in others a belief in other gods—he welcomed these other gods into himself. Not toleration for a new form of the divine, but welcome, which is altogether different. That, too, is why the Egyptians gave him divine honours, with all the titles of the Pharaohs his predecessors—'King of Upper Egypt and King of Lower Egypt, son of Ra', and many others.

In truth what had brought Alexander to Egypt was not merely the desire to shut the Persians out of any naval base on the Mediterranean or to win for himself the rare title of Pharaoh: it was the desire for an answer to a question which had been troubling him from childhood. Had not his mother, Olympias the god-possessed, been endlessly haunted by divine presences that filled her dreams and her couch? Whose son was he? That was what Alexander had to know; that was what sent him, with a soul prepared to believe anything of god, to make the journey to the shrine of Zeus-Ammon. That expedition to the oracular temple, in a desert region far from Memphis and beset with obstacles, would remain one of the strangest and most inexplicable undertakings of Alexander, were it not the most revealing. What did he ask the famous oracle, and what answer did he receive? On these points historians give contradictory answers.

After following the coast for miles, he turned into the ocean of sand where the Oasis of Siwa is hidden. There the guardian priest of the shrine greeted him by the name 'son of Ammon', a title reserved for the Pharaohs and no other. Then Alexander was ushered into the shrine, but alone, asked his question and received the answer of the god. What question and what answer? To his friends' pressing questions, as he came out, he responded only with silence: but who can fail to read that silence? It is that of a man rapt in contemplation of a mystery revealed to him. The revelation of his divine birth, the conviction that he was not the son of Philip, but engendered by the god himself, Ammon-Ra, in the womb of Olympias—only this can explain the depth of the king's silence. He had been told by the god 'all that he wished to know': that was the only reply that passed his lips. Had he anything else to ask the oracle? He never spoke of it again.

His confidence in his mission was singularly increased by this, and became unshakable. As the son of Zeus, he knew now that he had some task on earth to accomplish.

During his long journey to Siwa, while he was travelling along the empty seacoast, Alexander pointed out a place which he thought favourable for a port, near a fishing village and opposite the little island of Pharos. He ordered the foundation there of a city, which became, thanks to circumstances which he partly created himself, the greatest in his empire, the capital where in the centuries to come the futures of the East and West met and fused. This was Alexandria, which was to give its name to the culture of the coming age. Not only did an intuition of Alexander's genius suggest its foundation, but he gave its dimensions and its plan, in accordance with the requirements of the new art of town-planning: he created its double harbour by ordering a mole to be constructed from the shore to the isle of Pharos.

In the spring of 331, bursting with new plans conceived during his stay in

Egypt, Alexander returned to the pursuit of Darius, and sped towards the conquest of the capitals of the old Mesopotamian and Persian Empires—'swift-footed' like his ancestor Achilles. He was twenty-five.

Passing again through Tyre, he offered imposing sacrifices to Heracles, the great ancestor, held brilliant gymnastic and musical competitions, and performed tragedies—proud to offer Barbarians the most perfect fruits of Greek civilization. He had done the same in Egypt, essaying this most audacious of mixtures in the millenium-old setting of Memphis. For the twenty-five-year-old Barbarian youth, Greek tragedy still had the juice and savour of a fruit barely ripe.

But then, after the entertainments of Tyre, Alexander resumed his task as conqueror, devourer of kingdoms. He crossed the Euphrates, crossed the Tigris. Since Issus, Darius had had plenty of time to bring together contingents from the remoter parts of his domains, dwellers in Bactriana and Sogdiana, Chaldeans, Armenians, Median hillmen and Indians with their spectacular elephants—many others as well. He had arrayed all these in a vast plain where—this time—he would not lack space for his plan of encircling Alexander—the plain of Gaugamela, not far from Arbela. Arrian estimates his army at forty thousand horse and a million foot. There were also the oldest tanks in the history of warfare—two hundred chariots armed with scythes, a weapon out of date already: the Greek soldiers opened their ranks to let them pass, or seized the horses by the bridles and threw the drivers off.

Once again, hurling himself at the head of his cavalry into the heart of this incredible press of soldiers, and engaging in a furious hand-to-hand mêlée wherever any resistance occurred, Alexander carried the day. The battle ended in a huge massacre: on the Macedonian side, some hundred dead, not more; on the Persian, hundreds of thousands.

History crashed in ruins.

Darius had disappeared into the mountains. The son of Olympias took possession of his prize, Babylon, amidst the applause of women. He assumed the title of king of Asia. Other capitals surrendered to the conqueror—ancient Susa, Persepolis with its by no means legendary treasures, Pasargada the holy city, Ecbatana. All these names, most of them familiar to Greek ears through old Aeschylus' poem, cost the army no more than the dust of a march.

In a decision which is difficult to understand—as a reward in the hour of victory probably—Alexander gave one of his capitals to his rejoicing troops to plunder, devastate and set on fire. It was the wealthy Persepolis, with its sumptuous palaces, its Apadana (the famous hall of the hundred columns), its piles of gold and silver ingots and mounds of precious stones. Parsa—or Persepolis as we know it, by the Greek name—was gutted by fire. It was from this city that the invaders of

Greece had set out of yore, in the time of Marathon, and later, when Athens was taken and burnt, in 480, the glorious year of Salamis. Alexander was not averse from playing the part of divine justice in the eyes of the Greeks. By according the soldiers the royal pillage of Persepolis, he was repaying them for their labours just at the time when, in the Peloponnese and elsewhere, risings were breaking out against the absent overlord, and agitating public sentiment in the whole of Greece —but need we search so hard to find reasonable explanations for each of the acts that issue every moment from a nature so passionate?

Darius meanwhile was still in flight. From Media he had reached Caspiae Portae, and Alexander was riding madly after him over mountains and deserts, sometimes galloping day and night. At last he caught up with his quarry—Darius lay expiring by the roadside, forsaken by all except his dog: one of his satraps had assassinated him. Alexander shed tears over the pitiful fate of his enemy. He condemned the murderer to be tortured to death. Darius was buried with royal honours in the tomb of his ancestors (330).

Then Alexander plunged still deeper into the East. He spent three years conquering the countries to the East of the Caspian Sea and the North of India, today called Turkestan, Afghanistan, and Baluchistan, and in antiquity Margiana, Bactriana, and Sogdiana. He founded several Alexandrias, certain of which are still today the capitals of those regions— Khojend, Samarkand, Herat, Kandahar. He has been credited with the foundation of seventy cities—the exaggeration is obvious (who saw, or who made out, the list?). At the most the number should be sixteen. But no Greek had ever marched so far over these distant roads: Alexander dreamed of reaching 'the eastern edge of the world'. Soon he was to set off again tirelessly; so were his successors after him.

But, as he became 'orientalized', accommodating himself to the customs and wearing the garments of his new subjects—and scandalizing thereby his army and most of the Greeks in his suite—the lure that drew him on was not only the conquest of more space, the founding of cities, or the discovery of new countries; he was at the same time moving backwards in time, discovering the past, trying to make his own the history of the people that was now his people, to possess their past, and in some sort refound the dynasty of which he posed as the present representative. He sought out and found in Pasargada the tomb of Cyrus, the great ancestor; he read and restored the inscription that sacrilegious hands had defaced. It ran, 'O man, I am Cyrus son of Cambyses, who founded the empire of Persia and ruled over Asia. Do not grudge me my monument.'[1] Alexander gave careful orders for the restoration of the epitaph and the monument; their extent and detail are a measure of his fervent piety and the fraternal bond which, in spite of death, linked him with the greatest of his forerunners.

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 223.

Then the lure of great distances drew him on again. From Sogdiana (the region of Samarkand, today Uzbekistan) he looked southward at the lofty rampart of the Hindu Kush which separated him from India—the land of riches and wonders, the conquest of Dionysus and the Maenads, and also of Heracles his ancestor. He marshalled a large army, crossed the steep mountain passes in 327, and came out in the valley of a tributary of the upper Indus, the Kabul; he founded the city that bears the name of this river, while monkeys chattered and mocked in the trees. In Capisene and Gandhara[1] he came to the real India. The Indians resisted, stirred up by the brahmans; there were plenty of difficulties in this new country, as vast as a continent. King Porus offered battle; in his army appeared two hundred elephants, whose formidable bulk terrified the horses of the Macedonian cavalry, but the Greek bowmen shot down the mahouts and the beasts ran wild and trampled on more Indians than enemies. Finally Porus surrendered and his conqueror, ever chivalrous, treated him as a king and made a friend of him.

This meeting between the Greek and Indian worlds is of extreme importance from the point of view of world history; for it is the meeting of two of the three great humanisms thrown up by antiquity—Greek humanism, and Buddhist (originally Brahman) humanism.

The message of Sakya-Muni, who was to become the Sage *par excellence*, the Buddha, was beginning to spread in India when Alexander made his appearance there. It met religious tendencies which were present in the Indian soul of the time and of all times, and were to continue there even outside Buddhism, in which they came to a brilliant flowering—though it could not fill their place. The ascetic tendency in Buddhism came close to that other asceticism which stemmed in curious fashion from Socrates, and was to flourish in Greece—had already begun to flourish in Alexander's time, with the Cynic school, both the mendicant Cynics and those reputed as the apostles of hard work. It was close also to Platonic asceticism.

Alexander met ascetics in India, and had them questioned in his presence. Certain of the replies he elicited have a singularly Greek style, rather too Greek, we may think—the paradoxical manner which was one of the forms of thought of the sophists. One of these sages, asked by Alexander 'what was the surest way for a man to be loved', replied, 'to become the most powerful and not make himself

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[1] The first of these place-names is written Kapiça in the Swiss edition, as if from some Indian form which I have not traced. If it denotes the satrapy of Capisene of which Pliny says (VI 92) that its city Capisa was destroyed by Cyrus, it is in the Eastern Province of Afghanistan. Gandhara lay in the Peshawar valley, and the two therefore stood W. and E. of the old North-West Frontier, N. of the Khyber. In what sense they are called *le cœur profond de l'Inde* is not clear.

23. *Ptolemy I*

feared'. Such replies seem as if culled from the debate, ever continuing in Greek thought, concerning the Tyrant: they also fit very aptly (suspiciously so) the debate Alexander was forced to hold with his own destiny.

He met yet other sages and ascetics in India—the group, for instance, whom he found talking naked in the field where they held their classes, who spoke to him with esteem of Socrates, Pythagoras and Diogenes. He who seemed their teacher, one Dandamis, asserted that he needed nothing and feared the lack of nothing:

> . . . *India, with the fruits of her soil in due season, is enough for me while I live; and when I die, I shall be rid of my poor body—my unseemly housemate.*

These words, Arrian adds, convinced the king that he was 'a free man'.[1]

He also met and conceived deep affection for the ascetic Kalyana—whose name in its Greek form Calanos came to signify 'brahman'. Knowing that he longed greatly to die, he had a pyre reared for him at his request; the Indian mounted and perished in the flames without a word of complaint, before the astonished eyes of the whole army—except Alexander who had refused to watch the voluntary death of his friend. In the same way, somewhat later, the death took place at Olympia of the enigmatic Peregrinus, a Christian apostate who became a Cynic philosopher.

Thus did Greek wisdom and Indian wisdom rub shoulders in India as Alexander passed.

After his death and the dissolution of his empire, the commercial and cultural contacts which his expedition had set up between India and the eastern provinces of Persia on the one hand, and the Greek world on the other, were not broken, but reinforced in the course of time by some of his successors. Already in his lifetime, Nearchus's expedition, which was made on his orders, had been an opportunity to reconnoitre the whole course of the Indus from its upper reaches to its mouth, and then the eastern shores of the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf.

At the break-up of the Empire—still immense—of his Asiatic successors, the Seleucidae, a Greek kingdom was set up in the far eastern regions of Bactriana and Sogdiana, seventy years after Alexander's death, under the Greek satrap of the country, Diodotus I. His subjects were a mixture of Greeks, Iranians and Parthians. The citadel of Bactra (one of the Alexandrias of the great Macedonian) was the capital. There in the middle of central Asia these kings maintained Greek influence, on the edge of the Siberian steppes. One of them set about reconquering that same Kabul valley through which Alexander had come down from the Hindu Kush.

These rulers, who were Greek princes, heirs of Alexander, kept up the Greek language and Greek customs in their courts and governments, and practised Greek civilization in the heart of India, in those mountainous provinces of Capisene and

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 226.

24. *Graeco-Buddhist Art: The Hadda Buddha. Paris, Guimet Museum*

Gandhara we have already mentioned—and that until the beginning of the first century after Christ. Witness numerous figures of Buddha or Bodhisattva (as the Buddha is called in his incarnations before Sakya-Muni) or of gods or demons, belonging to a style long termed Graeco-Buddhist. Certain authorities have, it is true, very recently cast doubt on this Graeco-Buddhist art, basing their objections on certain Soviet diggings: they now call it Irano-Partho-Buddhist. But I think the term Graeco-Buddhist will go on being used; and for my part, as a layman in the matter who is sensitive to the charming serenity ('charming' in the strong sense) of many Indian figures in the Musée Guimet,[1] I let myself be convinced by their distant resemblance to Apollo or Aphrodite (or sometimes both together) that there has been an influence of Greek sculpture on archaic Indian art. It is true that smiles and charms are not the exclusive privileges of one people, and may flower on any human lips.

Meanwhile, in the northern part of the Greek kingdom of Bactriana spreading to upper India, and in that Sogdiana which cost Alexander such pains to conquer, there were Greeks living as if at the end of the world, on the threshold of the Pamir—in Alexandria Eschata for instance (Alexandria the Last, now Khojend); if one of them looked eastwards his view was stopped by the huge mass of the Tien Shan, the Celestial Mountains. Beyond them lay, half asleep at that date, the Chinese world, still entirely unknown, and Chinese humanism, the third and most ancient of the great humanisms of the ancient world.

Soon after, about the end of the Alexandrian era, the famous Silk Road, strung from oasis to oasis, passed to the South of the Celestial Mountains—that route by which the fine ladies of Rome received from China the silk stuffs out of which they made those transparent robes stigmatized by the satirist Juvenal. The exchange of the merchandise of East and West took place on the Pamir plateau. It was thanks in the first place to Alexander and his expedition that this trade route was opened up, and the Greek merchants met Chinese traders at the Stone Tower. For the first time the ancient world was becoming one.

When he had (temporarily) subdued the Indus region, Alexander had reached the end of his journey—though not the end he himself had marked out: he meant to go still further. Even before he reached the Indus, the Ganges had become his Promised Land.

He believed that from there he could return to Europe; for he had no idea of the existence of the Indian Ocean, and thought he could regain his Macedonian starting-point through the sources of the Nile, and Egypt. But his European soldiers—Greeks and Macedonians—refused to follow him. Many of these men, in eight and a half years, had travelled eighteen thousand kilometres[1] (almost half the earth's circumference). For seventy days they had been marching and fighting in the Plain of the Five Rivers, the Punjab, beneath the torrential rains of the monsoon. Alexander reflected, alone in his tent, for two days. Then he announced to his men that they were returning to their homeland. Twelve altars were erected at the spot to the gods of Olympus, and a column of bronze on which was written 'Here Alexander halted' (in 327).

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[1] Or Musée National des Religions, in Paris; it has rich collections of oriental religious antiquities (Translator).

Years passed—not many: destiny is niggardly. Alexander had returned as far as Babylon: he was organizing his empire, working out and inaugurating his own personal style of government.

For some time one thought had occupied him, and was anchoring itself more and more deeply in him. Probably it had taken birth in him at the time when he received the revelation of the oracle of Zeus-Ammon. King of Macedonia, Protector of the Greeks, Pharaoh of Egypt, king of Asia, Alexander owed his care equally to each of his subjects; but it was not right that he should reign in one fashion here, in another there—he was Alexander wherever he might be; in whatever country under his dominion in the three known continents, he was the one Alexander. What he wished was, by his person and in his person to bring about the fusion of the peoples he had conquered and who remained under his dominion. To make *concord* reign between them—concord between Greeks and Barbarians.

The fusion of peoples in and through concord, brought about by the personal power of the ruler, at first sight seems merely a political idea and, to us, not a particularly original one. In Greece it was new, and it represents a considerable advance on the régime of the city, which had degenerated, or more correctly, had never reached a condition of stability.

By this fusion Alexander was seeking to bring his different subjects close to himself and closer to one another, Greeks to Barbarians. The novelty, for a man nurtured in Hellenic thought, was extreme.

To see a king of Greek education bestow on Barbarians—on natives!—his confidence and friendship, entertain the foremost Persian nobles at his court and board, and confer on them important posts in the government or the army, aroused indignation in the Macedonians as much as in the Greeks. Indignation or derision. The king was going too far—dressing like an oriental; conforming to oriental ceremonial, so that no man could approach the Great King except after falling on his face. Was it vanity or policy, his Greek subjects wondered? Should one laugh or weep to see Greeks bend the knee before a Barbarian?

Or should one rebel? Plots were formed, conspiracies of assassination. When the son of Philip announced his intention of admitting sons of Persian noblemen into his guard, the Macedonians passed from murmurs to revolt. Some of these plots Alexander put down with extreme sternness, especially the one in which he suspected (wrongly, or so it seems) that Philotas, his childhood companion, was involved. That time, he committed in his anger what was a certain crime: on mere suspicion of his complicity, without hearing his defence, he ordered the execution of Philotas' father, the general Parmenio, an old friend of Philip and the faithful servant of Alexander as of his father. At other times the voices of reason and friendship were silenced by drunkenness and the violence of a temperament sensitive to the slightest mockery, which he took at once as an insult to his kingly state. When he took up a spear and killed his nurse's brother Clitus, his friend and his saviour at Granicus, for having twice spoken slightingly of him, both were in their cups.

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[1] Some 11,250 miles (Translator).

Philotas, Clitus—both intimate friends of the king, both intimate enemies of his feeling for the Barbarians, which they looked on as degrading!

In reality neither the Greeks nor the Macedonians, in those last years of his reign, grasped the significance of Alexander's new behaviour. The Macedonian nobles were accustomed to treat their king as a comrade; the Greeks felt humiliated to see their master condescend towards a vanquished people—a people that was not Greek, but Barbarian!

What was there to understand? Vanity? Not vanity, or a trifle at most, and almost excusable; it would be more just to say legitimate pride at having reached so high a state. As for clothing, Plutarch notes in this connexion that Alexander did not consent to wear the dress of the Medes, but took that of the Persians,

> *for it was much more simple than the Median. Since he deprecated the unusual and theatrical varieties of foreign adornment . . . he wore a composite dress adapted from both Persian and Macedonian fashion.*[1]

Policy, of course; but that explanation remains inadequate. What was the origin of the new policy?

What needed to be understood was, in the first place, that Alexander was not a Greek; so he had no reason in his own nature to accept as self-evident the division of mankind into two races that could never meet, that of Greeks and non-Greeks, those the Greeks called Barbarians. A distinction which, according to Demosthenes and many another, placed him, the master of the world, among the Barbarians.

Alexander, a Barbarian? Was he? He had asked himself the question, he cannot have failed to ask it. He had answered by proclaiming loudly the equality of Greeks and Barbarians, the friendship, and—to use a word which for some time has become habitual with historians of Alexander—he had proclaimed the *brotherhood* of Greek and Barbarian. Towards this brotherhood Alexander had been tending, unknowingly at the first, during the whole of his career.

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[1] *Moralia*, edited and translated by Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb Classical Library, 1936, Vol. IV, p. 401.

What was a Barbarian, in any case? Originally, as we know, just a man who does not speak the Greek language, a man who goes 'bar-bar-bar' in his throat—who can only stammer hoarsely, with an incomprehensible animal cry. But to this primitive sense which Alexander knew, a new sense had been added in the fourth century—by Demosthenes for one, with great clarity: a sense that Alexander could not but know, according to which a Barbarian was not only a non-Greek, an alien, but a gross, uncouth creature, inferior and born to be a slave.

This 'racist' sense of the word Barbarian is found quite clearly in Plato. For the author of the *Republic*, the Barbarians are our enemies 'by nature'. Our hatred for them is 'natural': it is right to make war on them and annihilate them. For Aristotle, who taught Alexander to think, the Barbarians are not only such 'by nature', but they are also, 'by nature', slaves.

He therefore advised the king, in a letter written personally to him of which Plutarch has preserved vestiges,

> *to treat the Greeks as if he were their leader, and other peoples as if he were their master; to have regard for the Greeks as for friends and kindred, but to conduct himself toward other peoples as though they were plants or animals.*[1]

Alexander on this point firmly opposes his master's opinion. For him we are not Greeks or Barbarians 'by nature'. Birth and blood mean nothing here; we become one or the other by *culture*.

He had been trained to that lofty Greek humanism offering itself freely to all men without any proviso for segregation, which runs from Homer to Aristophanes —that thoroughgoing humanism before the aberration of nationalism which came in the late fifth and fourth centuries. Does anyone think the conqueror of Persia did not know Herodotus, the author who, from end to end of his *Enquiries*, so full of affection for all forms of human behaviour, records with equal delight 'the remarkable achievements of Greeks and Barbarians'? Herodotus' curiosity and enthusiastic enjoyment take fire at any feat of intellect or energy, or any wonderful thing away among far-off lands and peoples. (And for that very reason the contemporaries of Plutarch called Herodotus a *φιλοβάρβαρος*, in the pejorative sense which the word could acquire.) Does anyone think the conqueror of the Persians, who sent home from furthest Asia, so Plutarch says, for the works of the three great tragedians of Athens, did not read again and again that noble poem of Aeschylus, *The Persians*, which takes for its subject not the victory of Athens at

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 397–9.

Salamis, as we still hear it said, but the defeat of Salamis, and the disaster of the Persian people and its king in Athenian waters? Aeschylus, the soldier of Salamis, in the midst of the débris of fire-ravaged Athens, among the devastated olives and the vines severed at the root by the invader, wrote the tragedy of pity for Persia, and made his countrymen's hearts keep time with the weeping of the conquered foe. And Aristophanes, in an Athens beleaguered by the enemy, had faced the raging tides of imperialism and demagogy with the insolent laughter of his defeatist plays, and raised up out of the squalid depths of political argument and personal abuse the vision of peace reigning supreme—peace for all, friends or enemies, a peace radiant with poetry and pagan humanity. And Thucydides, high over the conflicts of the world-wide war that broke for ever the power of his own country, had built the tranquil citadel of truth, from which to look above the sea of passions and search for eternal laws to guide the future.

In that humanism, Alexander's thought and action had been nurtured, his dedicated love for all men has its roots there.

And there was Homer. Alexander loved the *Iliad* madly, read it every night before sleep and laid it beside his pillow with his sword. May we not believe that, steeped as he was in the violent affirmation of humanity that paradoxically fills this poem of death, when Alexander killed in battle, as so many times he did, he could not have failed to think of those words with which Achilles stabs Lycaon: 'Yes, my friend, you too must die. . . . Even Patroclus died, who was a better man than you by far.'[1]

This gift of friendship accompanying the stroke of death was already a prefiguring of the deep brotherhood which unites all humans, Greeks and Barbarians, friends and enemies, into the same community in the face of the common necessity of death.

But was Alexander the only one to read this into Homer? At all events, expressions like those of Plato and Aristotle which I have quoted above, were setting the tone for Greek thought in his day. A chauvinistic fever was running through the country, which the poets had not escaped. Euripides already, in his masterpiece of *Iphigenia*, had put into the mouth of the unhappy daughter of Agamemnon this horrible line as justification of her sacrifice:

The Barbarian is born for slavery, the Greek for freedom.

The enmity between Greek and Barbarian had become an axiom as unquestioned as it was unverifiable, but Alexander was challenging it, in his deeds and intentions. As Plutarch puts it so well:

For he did not overrun Asia like a robber nor was he minded to tear and rend it, as if

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[1] *Iliad* XXI 106–7, translated by E. V. Rieu, Penguin Classics, 1950, p. 383.

it were booty and plunder bestowed by unexpected good fortune, after the manner in which Hannibal later descended upon Italy. . . . But Alexander desired to render all upon earth subject to one law of reason and one form of government and to reveal all men as one people, and to this purpose he made himself conform. But if the deity that sent down Alexander's soul into this world of ours had not recalled him quickly, one law would govern all mankind, and they all would look toward one rule of justice as though toward a common source of light. . . . Therefore, in the first place, the very plan and design of Alexander's expedition commends the man as a philosopher in his purpose not to win for himself luxury and extravagant living, but to win for all men concord and peace and community of interests.[1]

And elsewhere:

> *As he believed that he came as a heaven-sent governor to all, and as a mediator for the whole world . . . he brought together into one body all men everywhere, uniting and mixing in one great loving-cup, as it were, men's lives, their characters, their marriages, their very habits of life. He bade them all consider as their fatherland the whole inhabited earth, as their stronghold and protection his camp, as akin to them all good men, and as foreigners only the wicked.*[2]

So the racist theory which had become traditional, and was creating in Hellenic thought an impassable gulf between Greek and Barbarian, was challenged by Alexander, who in one of the boldest and most far-reaching revolutions of history, put in its place a new conception, that of humanity, in which there would be only one legitimate distinction between men—that between the good and the wicked.

As to the fact emphasized in these passages of Plutarch—the fact that he did not follow Aristotle's advice to treat the Greeks as if he were their leader, and other peoples as if he were their master, there seems no room for any doubt at all. I shall quote examples in a moment. It remains to find the cause.

Here and there in this account it must have become clear that Alexander was not only a great general and a great statesman, but that this great man of action, in his profoundest designs, was influenced by motives which one would be tempted to call romantic, but for the anachronism of the word. Let us put it more simply—that the son of Philip and Olympias had the double character of his parents, the character of a mystic, but one who could only be satisfied with himself when he had given reality, on a world-wide scale, to his visions.

To obliterate the distinction between Greeks and Barbarians was his most ambitious dream; it was the great principle which, at the bidding of the god who spoke in secret with him in an Egyptian shrine, he tried to apply in the service of the unity of ancient society, of the motley world he had conquered. If we would rethink the acts and the thought of Alexander in this spirit at once mystic and realist, we must lay down a few premisses, very simple but at that time very new. They were these.

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 405.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 399.

God is the father of all men, and all men, whether Greek or Barbarian, are brothers. All peoples—all known to Alexander—should be induced to cherish the same feelings for one another and live in concord. All men, finally, instead of remaining passive as mere subjects of the ruler, should share with him in the administration of the Empire.

These conceptions, with their finer implications, belong to the great idea of *concord*, in which, ever since the end of Greek antiquity, men have expressed their almost universal desire to live without war.

But to grasp them more precisely, we should read the passages already quoted in the light of another passage, drawn from Plutarch's principal work on Alexander. (I quote from the *Life of Alexander*, in Amyot's translation.)

> *It is said also, that he heard Psammon the philosopher in Egypt, and that he liked his wordes very well, when he saide that god was king of all mortall men: For (quoth he) he that commaundeth all things, must needes be god. But Alexander selfe spake better, and like a philosopher* [φιλοσοφώτερον], *when he said: That god generally was father to all mortall men, but that particularly he did elect the best sorte for him selfe.*[1]

Here we see the division into Greeks and Barbarians declared non-existent in the eyes of God (who is 'father generally to all mortall men'), and replaced by that between the good and the wicked. So thought Alexander, making express reference to God. Referring to Homer too, for the expression he gives to his thought brings immediately to mind that used in the *Odyssey*, 'Zeus, father of men and gods'.

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Alexander's action then, is fed by this thought—Zeus is the common father of all men, and specially of the virtuous. Here for the first time, at least in the western world, appears the idea that *all men are brothers*, indirectly expressed.

On at least two occasions during his expedition, Alexander publicly exhibited this confidence of his in the brotherhood of men, and his desire to unite them in concord.

It is well known that he had a serious dispute with his Macedonian soldiers on the homeward journey, at Opis. The old guard, the kernel of the army, could not understand how Alexander could send the veterans back home, and even less how he could open the ranks of this crack corps to Persians—natives! The whole army was up in arms: they refused to fight shoulder to shoulder with Barbarians—they would rather abandon their king. Alexander called the entire army together and reminded his men what he had done for them, what they had done together, and what was still left to do. But faced with the sullen silence of his hearers, he felt choler mounting inside him, and his last words were spoken in a storm of anger and geography:

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[1] Translated by Sir Thomas North, David Nutt, 1895, Vol. IV, p. 331. This version of 1579 was made directly from the famous French translation by J. Amyot in 1572 (Translator).

> *But you all wish to leave me. Go then! And when you reach home, tell them that Alexander your king, who vanquished the Persians and Medes and Bactrians . . .; who crushed the Uxii, . . . and the Drangae, and added to his empire Parthia, the Chorasmian waste, and Hyrcania to the Caspian Sea; who crossed the Caucasus beyond the Caspian Gates, and Oxus and Tanais and the Indian Stream, which none but Dionysus crossed before him . . . yes, and Hyphasis too, had you not feared to follow; who by both mouths of the Indus burst into the Great Sea beyond, and traversed the desert of Gadrosia, untrodden before by any army; . . . who was brought back by you to Susa, when his ships had sailed the ocean from India to Persia—tell them, I say, that you deserted him and left him to the mercy of barbarian men, whom you yourselves had conquered. Such news will indeed assure you of praise upon earth and reward in heaven. Out of my sight* [ἄπιτε]![1]

On that terrible 'Out!' Alexander flung from the tribune and rushed to shut himself up in his palace, as he did each time he was overcome with passion—as in the anger which cost his bosom friend Clitus his life. But two days after the scene at Opis, the fever of his blood calmed by silence, fasting and inaction, or rather caught up by a new impulse by which he returned to action (how like his ancestor Achilles!);

> *On the third day he sent for the Persian officers who were in the highest favour and divided among them the command of the various units of the army. Only those who were related to him by blood were now permitted to give him the customary kiss.*[2]

But the Macedonians, stung by the king's speech—this king they loved above all men—and desperately hurt at hearing what treatment the foremost Medes and Persians were receiving from him, could restrain themselves no longer. They ran in a body to the palace, threw down their arms before the doors in sign of supplication, and swore that they would not stir from the spot day or night 'until Alexander took pity on them'. So we see the army imploring the pity of the only public figure involved in the harsh history of Greece who ever felt it.

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[1] *Arrian*, trans. cited, pp. 234–5.

[2] *Ibid.*—The sense is 'who were admitted to kinship in virtue of this rank'; cf. below (Translator).

Alexander came out and saw the soldiers humiliated and unmanned by the love they bore him.

> *He was so touched by their grovelling repentance and their bitter lamentations that the tears came into his eyes. While they continued to beg for his pity, he stepped forward as if to speak, but was anticipated by one Callines, an officer of the mounted Hetaeri, distinguished both by age and rank. 'My lord,' he cried, 'what hurts us is that you made Persians your kinsmen—Persians are called "Alexander's kinsmen"—Persians kiss you. But no Macedonian has yet had a taste of this honour.'*

Alexander stopped him with this simple and noble reply:

> *'Every man of you . . . I regard as my kinsman, and from now on that is what I shall call you.'*
>
> *Thereupon Callines came up to him and kissed him, and all the others who wished to do so kissed him too.*[1]

Alexander celebrated this reconciliation with his army—which was a reconciliation between Macedonians, Greeks and 'Barbarians'—by making sacrifice to the gods and inviting nine thousand persons of many different nationalities to an immense feast. He presided over it, surrounded by his Macedonians, the leaders of the Persians, and men of the other nations who were distinguished by rank and merit. During the feasting Alexander himself made one single libation in the name of all, 'praying for concord above all other blessings, and friendly fellowship in command between Macedonians and Persians'.

In this scene Alexander appears as the reconciler of peoples, the bringer of concord, under a special mission from Zeus.—We can be more precise: it must have been from Zeus-Ammon, in the shrine at the Oasis of Siwa, that he received his mission.—He mingles their customs and lives as in a loving-cup; he offers them a share in his rule. The two most striking words in the account by Arrian occur again, and in the same order, in Plutarch—they are ὁμόνοια, the union of hearts and thoughts, and κοινωνία τῆς ἀρχῆς, fellowship in rule.

Another scene shows him in the same light—the scene of the marriages at Susa. This time, the intention of Alexander was to bring about the 'fusion' of the peoples of antiquity by mixture of blood, or, in Plutarch's words,

> *By the ties of lawful love and chaste nuptials and mutual joy in children that they join the nations together.*[2]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 236.

[2] *Moralia*, trans. cited, p. 401.

A splendid pavilion was set up in Susa; the floor was covered in oriental rugs, the walls were hung with embroideries representing scenes from mythology; around the table bearing the feast nearly a hundred divans awaited the guests—the affianced couples representing East and West. A procession advanced, at the head Alexander and his new bride Statira, the eldest daughter of Darius III; then came the principal generals, Hephaestion, Alexander's best friend, who was marrying Statira's sister, Craterus, with a niece of Darius, and so for the rest—the whole Macedonian nobility (eighty Hetairoi) took daughters of eastern potentates to wife in the presence of the gods, and inscribed their unions in the royal annals. There was even the daughter of one of the king's most inveterate enemies, Spitamenes, the satrap of Sogdiana, on the arm of her bridegroom, Seleucus, who was to be one of the most powerful of Alexander's successors.

A few years earlier Alexander had already set the example of such marriages, when he wedded Roxana, the daughter of a nobleman of Bactriana. His remarriage was not a repudiation of her: it was the polygamy of the East admitted into the manners of the Greeks.

Outside the pavilion other tables seated ten thousand officers, soldiers and mariners and their Asiatic wives. The nuptial feast lasted five days, with games, dancing, dramatic performances, athletic contests and music to heighten its splendour. Europe and Asia, the poets of Athens, Syracuse and Lesbos, but also the jugglers of India, the horsemen of Media and Persia, and the magicians of Iran contributed to the pleasure of the guests—no longer victors and vanquished, but peoples joining in the merriment of sport and the joy of the arts (not excluding the art of love, so their descendants said). This programme combined from the entertainments of all mankind was to be a prelude to that variegated civilization which gave lustre to the principal centres of the Hellenistic world in the following centuries—to Alexandria, Pergamum, Antioch, Seleucia on the Tigris, and eventually Imperial Rome. It was in February 324, that Alexander gave this magnificent marriage feast, the first fraternization between East and West, and a pledge to the peoples of the world of a concord and a friendship which he wished to be universal and lasting.

We may see how firmly this Pharaoh, King of all Asia, Protector of the Greeks, and king of Macedonia rejected the advice given by Aristotle, to treat his different subjects differently. Alexander's breach with his old master seems to have resulted from this refusal to admit the inborn inequality of Greeks and Barbarians. The quarrel can only have been aggravated when Callisthenes (Aristotle's nephew, who had followed the expedition in the role of its historiographer— a fairly favourable one, for that matter) had maintained in a public debate before the king that the Greeks were not obliged to adopt the custom of prostrating themselves which

Alexander, while not enforcing it, was trying to make them accept. Soon after, Callisthenes was arrested by the king's orders in connexion with the conspiracy of the 'pages'—youths who, in childish folly, almost in sport, had hatched a plot to assassinate him. Though innocent, the historiographer seems to have been condemned without trial, and was hanged out of hand. So the same king was generous enough to prefer not to remember the existence of Greeks and Barbarians, and petty enough not to be able to endure others to think differently from himself. Whatever he turned his hand to, passion guided him, not reason.

At the marriage feast in Susa he had even refused to admit that he had subjects—at his sides were only men and women celebrating their nuptials in equality and happiness, and sharing together the pleasures of board and bed, of sport and spectacle.

All things considered, Alexander's internal contradictions are astonishing. We have the man who orders the sack of Thebes and Halicarnassus, who brutally executes Parmenio, Philotas, Callisthenes, who assassinates Clitus, all innocent, all close to his affections: is it the same man who presides over and joins in the feast at Susa, calls all the soldiers in his army his kinsfolk, repudiates the Hellenic watchword of superiority to the Barbarian, and instead dreams of the friendship of the two? It is the same man. But what sort of man, in reality?

Alexander was a savage and an adolescent. Dying before the end of his youth, he remained that savage and adolescent all his days. A savage of genius, undoubtedly; and above all a savage enamoured of humanity. Aristotle had educated him, and disappointed him by trying to imprison him in the exclusive concept of Greek civilization as the only civilization. Thanks to his teaching, Alexander was in love with Greek civilization; but after Aristotle his education was carried on, by war and the conquest of the Barbarian world. That enterprise had been entered on under the auspices of Hellas—it was Greece and Macedonia that he marshalled to avenge the wrongs of Greece. But the further he plunged into the Barbarian world, first in Egypt, then at the world's end, the more he was impressed by the greatness of the Orient. He no more spoke as a Greek, but he did not speak as a Barbarian.—As a Graeco-Barbarian then? He had gone beyond that: *he spoke as a man.* He had been won by the humanity of all the men he had met, fought and overcome. On the edge of the world, the Indian Porus became his friend.

He was also drunk, not with wine, but with his own greatness—the greatness he went on discovering in himself as he also discovered the vastness of the world. The two greatnesses he could feel burning within him like a flame: a flame lit by whom —himself or God? He half-saw that it was the same thing; and if he had lived he would have had himself worshipped by mortal men.—'Let him be a god if he wishes,' was the reply of the Spartans to his request that the Greek cities should treat him as a god.—Alexander was tending towards immortality—the immortality of fame, but that of the gods as well.

At the same time this immortal god never ceased to be a savage. Just so we see the gods of the *Iliad*, those of Pindar in their own fashion, and those of Sophocles, are most consciously divine when they give themselves joyfully up to the incomprehensible savagery of their wrath, or any other passion.

Need we then feel astonishment if, in the full tide of vitality that filled Alexander, we meet with contradictions? Why should it surprise us if Alexander, no ordinary man, acted and thought differently from an ordinary man?—In two opposite ways—the murder of innocent comrades in the blindness of anger or drink, and the generosity of his acceptance in deed as well as in word, of every man in his Empire, Greek and Barbarian. His amazing acts evoke thoughts that are not less amazing. So let us put aside amazement; for the history of man is full of it from one end to the other.

But Plutarch also states, very strangely this time, that Alexander 'put into execution' an idea held by Zeno, the Stoic philosopher of the following century, that third century in which Alexander ought to have lived. 'All men,' according to Zeno, 'are citizens of the world.... There is but one world for all.' He would have all men live in it having the same manner of life,

even as a herd that feeds together and shares the pasturage of a common field.[1]

According to Plutarch, this new and forward-looking idea came to Zeno from Alexander, who had enshrined it in acts before it had ever been formulated. Zeno saw 'as it were in a dream', says Plutarch, a universe where concord reigned, founded on amity between peoples. Did he imagine it after the reality achieved by Alexander? It may well be: for action may take priority over thought. In any case they run in double harness—as the Greeks recognized when they paired the words *logos* and *ergon*—in all departments of human activity, and no less in the history of mankind.

But if we are really anxious to discover the link that seems missing in the chain joining Alexander and Zeno, we can point, among others, to the learned Alexarchus, who, in the generation separating the two, founded that city in Pamphylia (a dream-city, one might believe) which bore the fair name of Uranopolis. Its inhabitants called themselves not, as might have been expected, Uranopolitans but Uranidae—which means Sons of Heaven. On its coinage were seen the Sun, Moon and Stars, gods of nature and universally revered among ancient peoples, and at the same time gods of Stoicism, as well as representing the ruler, his spouse and the citizens of the City of Heaven. The same coins showed also the figure of the mythical daughter of Heaven who symbolizes—as already in Plato under the name of Celestial Aphrodite—Love at large in the universe.

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[1] Op. cit., p. 397.

Alexarchus's dream was to see all men members of his world-wide city. He had invented a special language for the Sons of Heaven (was it a sort of Esperanto?). The man is a strange figure about whom we know very little indeed, except that he was an inveterate dreamer and a learned philologist; but it is well known that the learned are often highly imaginative. Their hypotheses are their best means of coming close to reality: they deserve to be tried out.

Should we finally think that Zeno had received from Alexander—through Alexarchus the mystical philologist—this idea of human brotherhood which is a part, and an honourable part, of his system? It might be safer to say that it was in the air at that time; that the hour had struck for the horizons of the civilized world (of the Greek world in particular), which had never been restricted, to be suddenly widened.

Alexander was a conqueror in space: not only had he destroyed the Greek city, but he had spread out his empire to Egypt and Persia, to the Indus and the Punjab; and he had opened for his successors the road, still unknown, to China. Then came Zeno, to conquer not space but a sense of human community—as also had Alexander. Later came Paul of Tarsus, with whose God 'there is no respect of persons': he and the apostles of Christ proclaimed their 'good news' to circumcised and uncircumcised, Jews and Greeks—as Alexander had ceased to distinguish between Greeks and Barbarians. The doors of Christian brotherhood were opening. Much later still, brotherhood, *fraternité*, was one of the keywords of the great Revolution: men fraternized much in 1790. . . .

At the starting-point of that line of force, one of the most important in human civilization, is Alexander. He reminds us that no civilization is durable if it is not offered to all.

In June 323, Alexander was in Babylon; he was planning a new campaign, the conquest of Arabia; after that perhaps would come that of the West up to the Columns of Heracles, the great ancestor. Eventually, the friendship of Greece, Asia, Carthage, and Rome. On the thirteenth of June, struck down by a fever, the inspired son of Olympias and Philip died, aged less than thirty-three years, having lived barely the half of man's normal span.

His body, seamed with wounds and riddled with exploits, that spark of genius glowing with cruelty and violence, but also with human charity, was not allowed by his generals to be returned to the earth or scattered on the winds, to issue in new life. They had their fetish embalmed into a horrible mummy, over which they squabbled with threats and cries. Finally Ptolemy filched it, closed in its sarcophagus, hoping to keep for himself in Alexandria that lofty flame of inspiration which had burned for friend and enemy—for the whole world of men.

CHAPTER TEN

ANARCHY IN THE GUISE OF ORDER: THE FIRST TWO PTOLEMIES

After the death of Alexander we see the disappearance of a civilization which was already in decline, the Greece of Solon, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, distinguished in its political structure by the characteristic form of the city-state. But another civilization, which in many of its aspects was a continuation of the first, was in the process of birth: it was the civilization called Hellenistic—something quite new, with a completely different political structure. On the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean and in the Near East, as in Greece, the free democratic cities had gone. Four or five great states, ruled by princely dynasties, now occupied all the expanse of territory conquered by Alexander. In each of them was one great city, an administrative and cultural capital, which still—by the wish of the ruler rather than the people, and in utterly changed social conditions—could confer reputations on the authors of great literary and artistic productions, and in particular favoured the continuance of scientific discovery.

But that did not happen all at once. Alexander had predicted to his generals, 'You will celebrate my funeral in blood;' and it took twenty years of war to bring in this new order in anything like a stable form.

We must see what kind of order it was, and on what it depended apart from the will of the ruler and the strength of his army.

The most striking feature of the new order was the lack of any role for the people to play. These large states and densely populated cities—such as Alexandria, Pergamum or Antioch—contained no free citizens: nothing but a rabble of subjects. Numerous officials employed in the laborious and vexatious complications of government administration; and in addition an aristocracy of courtiers and nouveaux riches, around whom gravitated swarms of clients, freedmen and other parasites.

Where are we to look for the *people*? Was it the confused mass of city-dwellers, with their many trades and mixed nationalities and religions, a mere multitude with no desires in common, united if at all by a vague sentiment of loyalty to the ruler, but not by any community of interests, not by civic consciousness or commitment to some task undertaken by all to the glory of the gods or the astonishment of ages yet to come? Was it the agricultural population of the country districts—half-serfs, subjected, in Egypt for instance, to restrictions that appal us? There was nothing there but slavery, destitution, and a tyrannical tax-gathering machine; so that the peasants at the time were already reduced, in spite of the proverbial fertility of the Nile waters, to the state of fellahin, famished and naked.

Writers, artists and savants were usually isolated figures, for all the rigid formations into which the ruler or the leaders of coteries tried to fit them. They were summoned to live at court or in universities (called 'museums') by the ruler, for the service of his glory, by personal appointment, or because their branches of learning were patronized and subsidized. But what was there so uplifting in that? What soil was there in which creation could take root, and flower? What attachment or motive? The gods had become distant and dubious beings: man had not yet become conscious of his own greatness. There was love of Art, of course, and love of Truth and Beauty: but, cut off from popular festivals, cut off from political communities full of the will to live, cut off from gods and men, what became of the creative activity, of Beauty herself? It dwindled into preciosity, formal beauty, fostered in learned circles and coteries of literati, cultivated for pleasure by people in search of 'diversion'.

This order established by the authority of a ruler was, in truth, very close to disorder. In very little time it showed itself to be as unproductive as anarchy.

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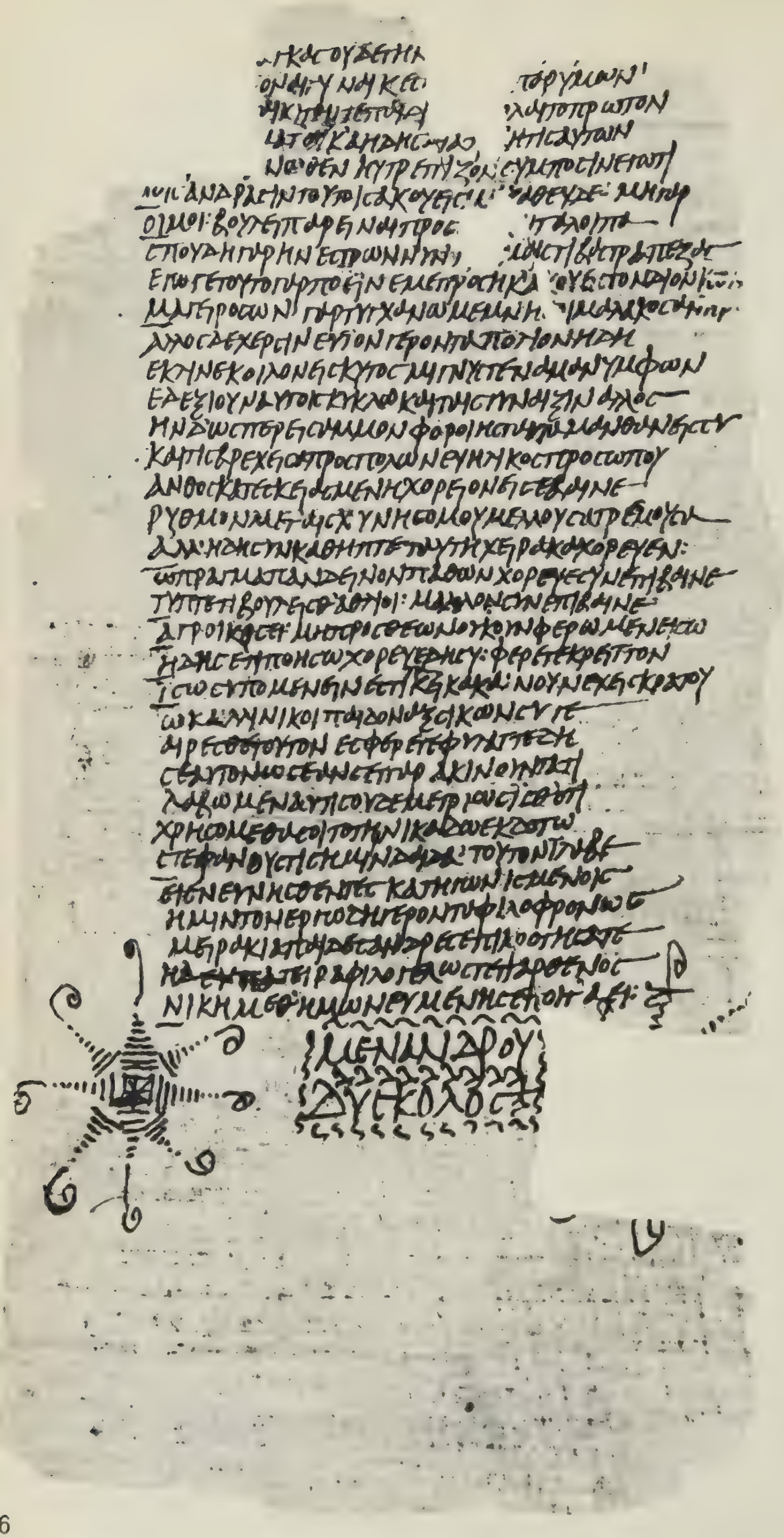
Let us consider two princes, the greatest in the Hellenistic world—the first two members of the dynasty of the Lagidae which reigned over the whole territory of Egypt. They are Ptolemy I and II, both men deserving of some admiration.

Ptolemy I, surnamed Sôter, that is, the Saviour, is a favourable specimen of the parvenu. Although fabulous genealogies concocted after his rise to power showed his descent from Heracles, the man was a soldier drawn from the lowest rank in the army. He could, it is true, give his father's name—a rather ridiculous one for a soldier, since it was Lagôs, signifying 'hare'—but not his grandfather's. Later, court flattery threw a veil over such modest origins; it has been noted that in the Septuagint translation of the Bible, which was produced in Alexandria, the hare is never referred to by the name of *lagôs*, but by one of the epithets of the animal, *dasupous*, 'the hairy-footed'.

In Alexander's campaigns, Ptolemy was not one of his most brilliant generals,

25. *Papyrus plants in the Arethusa fountain, Syracuse*


ΜΕΝΑΝΔΡΟΥ
ΔΥΣΚΟΛΟΣ

but one of his most reliable counsellors. He was some ten years older than his leader. It was he who was on guard at the door of Alexander's tent on the day of the pages' conspiracy; he who, when the king quarrelled with Clitus, had had the forethought to draw Clitus out of the tent, though in vain. During the whole expedition he showed up as a sensible man who followed the young king without enthusiasm but with unshakable loyalty.

Ptolemy had kept the official record of the campaign. It has been lost, but Arrian, who prized it highly, based his own history very largely on it. It was the work of an honest man attempting to preserve the truth against the romantic inventions that began to creep into the story as soon as the king was dead. Thus, he contradicted the legend that he had gained his title of Sôter by saving his leader's life in battle: though it was to his own honour, he would have none of it.

In the situation that followed Alexander's death, the son of Lagôs displayed all his soundness of judgment. He brought the redoubtable question of succession before the Council of Generals; and he was the first to propose the solution which proved in the course of time to be the only one possible (but it took ten years)—dismemberment of the Empire. In face of the rivalry among the generals, all of whom, or nearly all, aspired to the foremost place, he suggested a diplomatic formula—to entrust the government of the Empire to the generals. But the Council and army kept up the fiction of a king. They even nominated two kings—Alexander's unborn son by Roxana (if it was a boy), and Alexander's half-brother, Arrhidaeus, the son of Philip and a dancing-girl, who was more or less half-witted. At the same time agreement was reached on the choice of a Regent, the general Perdiccas. The two kings achieved nothing but to get themselves assassinated in the following years; and Perdiccas—as also, later, the general Antigonus who had the same designs as he—tried to impose his authority on his former comrades in arms, but only succeeded in provoking the formation of coalitions, several of which were headed by Ptolemy.

At the first Council of the Generals, Ptolemy also urged strongly that the satrapies should be shared among them. He was successful, and managed to obtain the best, one of the richest, the most unified, and the easiest to defend—Egypt. Once invested with this title he was in haste to leave Babylon: he had the decency to wait for Roxana's lying-in and the king's funeral, but immediately these two events were over he left for Egypt, in November 323. He never left that country again except to combat attempts to revive the Empire.

During a governorship, then a reign, lasting forty years (323–283), Ptolemy Sôter's foreign policy had a double aim—to free himself from dependence on the Regents, and to maintain between the other succession states a balance of power advantageous to Egypt.

26. *The end of the manuscript of Menander (the last lines contain the name of the poet and the title of the play*—The Bad-tempered Man), *Geneva, Bodmer Library*

I shall not relate the wars of the 'diadochi' (wars of the heirs, succession wars), which are abnormally complicated, with constant reversals of alliances. The hardest war for Ptolemy was not that against Perdiccas, but against Antigonus and his famous son Demetrius Poliorcetes who had a kind of genius for adventure, debauchery and war.

The old one-eyed Antigonus and Demetrius had almost succeeded in reconstructing the Empire. Asia belonged to them; and suddenly they threw themselves on Greece to snatch it from Cassander, who was reigning over Macedonia. Demetrius struck his great blow—he entered the Piraeus at the head of a magnificent fleet, took Athens, and proclaimed her 'independence' to the wild delight of the Athenians (independence under the suzerainty of his father Antigonus, of course).

It is worth while to read in Plutarch the story of the short honeymoon of the enthusiastic Poliorcetes and the city of Athens. He had been reared in the cult of Athens, her artists, her philosophers, and her 'liberty'. To restore her 'liberty' to Athens, then a subject of Macedonia (even if the word meant nothing), and to be celebrated as a saviour by Athens, had been the dream of his youth. He put as much passion into the conquest of Athens as into his love-adventures. Once master of the city, he plied her with presents, and let his head be turned with flattery. The Athenians, half sincerely, put unprecedented imagination into their adulatory compliments: statues, gold quadrigas, even altars, erected to the 'Tutelary Deities'; the office of the eponymous archon (who gave his name to his year of office) was abolished and replaced by a priest of the Tutelary Deity having the same function; a month of the year changed its name and became Demetrion; the Dionysia became the Demetria; the figures of Antigonus and his son were woven into the robe presented to Athena; an apartment for Demetrius was installed in the rear portion of the Parthenon—'although', observes Plutarch, 'his conduct made him most unfit to be quartered upon a virgin'.

Ptolemy meanwhile showed the natural reaction to this change in the balance of power. He equipped his fleet, but with rather too much of the wise deliberation which was a part of his character. In Cyprus—over which he had surreptitiously extended Egyptian domination—he made preparations for an offensive. Demetrius hastened up with his fleet, and Ptolemy rashly fought the battle of Salamis in Cyprus, in which his fleet was wiped out at one stroke. Ptolemy himself escaped the conqueror by the skin of his teeth, with a handful of ships, leaving in his hands 'the attendants, friends and women that had followed him', his engines of war, and eight thousand troops caught as in a trap.

So great a triumph was celebrated with extraordinary magnificence. Antigonus and Demetrius openly took the title of kings, secretly coveted by all the diadochi.

Then they erected commemorative and votive monuments everywhere. The famous Victory described as 'of Samothrace', one of the gems of the Louvre, is one of them; it had been a figure at the prow of a stone galley. Under the triumphant spread of her marble wings, she advances into the wind, against the waves whose presence is still felt in the folds of the garment and the backward tilt of the bust. Demetrius also indulged in the luxury of a courtly gesture: he returned to Ptolemy his captured friends and attendants, keeping for his own purposes only one, the fair Lamia.

Against these manifestations of enthusiasm and propaganda, which made a deep impression on Athens (who had received from the victor twelve hundred complete sets of armour from his booty), Ptolemy put a brave face on his reverse and counter-attacked vigorously. Though beaten, he also assumed the title of king—an act which is characteristic of his energetic nature. Then he began negotiations with his fellow-rulers—kings too, from now on—who were alarmed by the sudden power and growing ambition shown by Antigonus and his son. He formed a quadruple alliance with Seleucus—another victim of Antigonus, who had however by then regained the distant provinces of the Empire of which he claimed kingship—Lysimachus, king of Thrace, and Cassander, king of Macedonia. After many ups and downs, Ptolemy at length brought down the great adventurer Demetrius. A new Egyptian fleet had appeared in Greek waters, by which, once again, Greece was summoned to claim her 'liberty'; Demetrius' throne collapsed; he was taken prisoner and interned in a mountain St-Helena where he died after three years of debauchery and tedium. The Athenians had long before closed their gates to the fallen idol.

Thus ended the wars of the diadochi. Henceforth the kingdoms sprung from the dismembered Empire remained separate; but Egypt alone had found its dynasty and its unity immediately after the death of the great Macedonian. For that, the wisdom and diplomacy of Ptolemy I were no doubt largely responsible.

I shall not dwell on the internal régime of Ptolemy. Suffice it to say that he was tactful with the priests and established the worship of former Pharaohs who had remained popular. But taken all in all his rule over the Egyptian people—like that of his successors who followed his example—was a calculated exploitation of the resources of the rich land of 'black earth' in the interests of the court, the army (which he was obliged to keep up to defend his throne), and also of his fleet, through which he sought to assert his supremacy over the eastern Mediterranean.

Ptolemy Sôter did not succeed in Hellenizing Egypt. It was not enough to found two or three Greek cities, which remained closed to Egyptians, here and there in the country. In Alexandria, Hellenic culture was superimposed on Egyptian life, but there was no admixture. Here, Ptolemy Sôter also called in religion to his aid, and tried to popularize the cult of a new, or almost new, god and impose it at the same time on Greeks and Egyptians. He chose for his purpose a composite god worshipped in Memphis, named Serapis—whose very name is compounded of those of Osiris and the bull Apis. The worship of this god, made up of Greek rites recalling those of the Bacchic mysteries, was urged on Egyptians and Greeks alike, in the hope of bringing them together in a common religion. The aim was not attained, but the popularity of Serapis was tremendous for centuries, especially under the Roman Empire; Serapeums were erected all over the world—there was one at Alexandria, where Serapis worked numerous miracles.

As for the attempt to Hellenize Egypt by employing multitudes of Greek officials throughout the country, and settling everywhere regiments of mercenaries from every nation enrolled in the service of the crown—that kind of 'Hellenization' made no inroads on the stubborn resistance of the people. The transfer of an artificially imported Greek culture from Athens to Alexandria, which was the great ambition of the first two Ptolemies, scarcely interested any but the intellectuals engaged on the task—who were imported too—and those court and university circles for whose pleasure philologist-poets with innumerable bickerings were tilling the rough waste land of the Museum, and turning it into pleasant beds, flowering shrubberies and smiling borders.

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Before his death at the age of eighty-four, Ptolemy Sôter settled the difficult question of his succession. We must enter into these family complications of the Lagidae, for they are very instructive in helping us to grasp the deep-seated anarchy of those who were purporting to make order reign over a new world.

Ptolemy had had two legitimate wives, without counting the Asiatic princess married at Susa, who was soon forgotten. His first marriage with the princess Eurydice, the daughter of one of the Regents, was a political match, calculated to consolidate a temporary alliance. His second marriage with Berenice—probably a woman of the people—was a love-match; it did not break up the union with Eurydice, who was not repudiated till much later. This Berenice takes an important place in Alexandrian poetry, which sings her praises and extols her beauty and the union and fidelity of the two spouses, not without many unpleasant references to Eurydice. Thus, an idyll of Theocritus insinuates that Eurydice had borne to Ptolemy 'children that are never like their father'. Official history later gave out that Berenice was Ptolemy's sister on the father's side, being a daughter of Lagôs. This is extremely unlikely: the genealogy was forged to sanction, by the example of Ptolemy I, the brother-and-sister marriages practised by the Lagidae from the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (so named for that reason). However that may be, Ptolemy loved Berenice and the children she bore him, at the expense of Eurydice's.

By Eurydice he had several children, including a son surnamed Ptolemy Ceraunus (meaning thunder or thunderbolt), either because of his savage character, or because of the crimes in which his violence found vent. The courtiers, who knew which possessed the favour of the old king, contrasted the grace of Berenice's son, the future Philadelphus—the golden-locked Apollo of whom Theocritus speaks—with the harsh temper of Ceraunus. The poets also recalled that Zeus, who had won the throne of heaven, was yet the lastborn of the three sons of Cronos. In the end Ptolemy Sôter let himself be persuaded that he had to choose between vice and virtue, like Heracles at the crossroads; that his duty was to give his peoples a mild master, and to the learned an enlightened patron. So he disinherited Ceraunus.

The consequences of this decision were a series of frightful crimes which throw light on the moral standards of the new masters of the world. I shall tell the story, which has the additional advantage of introducing the principal figure in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, the woman whom historians call 'the demoniacal Arsinoe'.

Ceraunus, expelled from Egypt, had taken refuge at the court of Lysimachus, king of Thrace and Macedonia; there he found himself with two of his sisters; one, his half-sister Arsinoe, daughter of Ptolemy and Berenice, was married to King Lysimachus himself, and the other, called Lysandra, like himself a child of the first marriage, had married the heir to the throne, Agathocles. Now the demoniacal Arsinoe had fallen madly in love with Agathocles her brother-in-law, offered herself to him, and being repulsed, accused him in revenge of having tried to assassinate the king his father. Lysimachus, a violent man, blinded by senile passion for his young wife, threw his son into prison and left Arsinoe mistress of his fate. She plotted with Ceraunus, who agreed to kill Agathocles in his dungeon.

The young prince's murder roused public opinion against Lysimachus. The widow, Lysandra, demanded vengeance of King Seleucus in Antioch, and also of Ceraunus, of whose responsibility she was ignorant. Ceraunus saw that the adventure might be made to end in the fall of Lysimachus, leaving a vacant throne which he might occupy; he simulated indignation at the crime he himself had committed, and pushed Seleucus into war against Lysimachus. Lysimachus' kingdom collapsed. But just as Seleucus was preparing to make a triumphal entry into the capital, he was stabbed by Ceraunus, who was acclaimed by the soldiery and seized the crown.

So Ceraunus was on the throne of Macedonia. But he still had to reach agreement with his sister Arsinoe, the widow of Lysimachus, who claimed the throne for her sons. She was a dangerous adversary, and not easy to cheat, especially by this brother of hers whose capabilities in deceit and crime she knew. He then suggested to her that he should marry her and adopt her children—a neat solution of a delicate dynastic problem. Arsinoe remained distrustful, in retirement with her sons in another city. But then Ceraunus acted the part of a lover, making the marriage appear not only as a political expedient but as his dearest desire. Arsinoe, who perhaps was not hearing of love on the part of a brother for the first time, at last let herself be won over. The wedding was celebrated with magnificence. The loving bridegroom asked to be allowed to embrace his nephews, now his sons: and Arsinoe took him into their residence. Now Ceraunus dropped his mask: while his soldiers occupied the citadel, he stabbed the children himself in their mother's arms. She fled to Egypt. Some time later the Gauls invaded Macedonia and Ceraunus was killed defending his kingdom. The moralists triumphed—divine justice strikes the guilty soon or late.

The widow of two kings, Arsinoe returned to Egypt and set about finding a third. Her own full brother Ptolemy II was ruling the country. Ancient historians call her 'the emetic' because 'she was always being sick': certainly many foul calumnies also fell from her lips. Ptolemy II was already married to another Arsinoe, the daughter of Lysimachus; against this Arsinoe I, our 'demoniac' and 'emetic' Arsinoe II opened the same kind of campaign of slander that had served so well against her son-in-law Agathocles—who in fact was Arsinoe I's brother. The queen, she claimed, had formed a plot: she took care not to specify, but she insinuated that it was against her husband. Ptolemy II was no match for his formidable sister, his elder by eight years; still less when she turned on him the effect of her charms, for he was very sensually inclined. The campaign of combined slander and seduction culminated with complete success in the discovery of a so-called plot, in which the only proof of the queen's guilt was the queen's punishment. She was sent away into the Thebaid, while Arsinoe II mounted the throne and assumed the title of Philadelphus, in recognition of the love of her brother which alone had inspired her. The same title was later given to the king, who became Ptolemy Philadelphus.[1]

Meanwhile flatterers, in prose and in verse, turned the union of brother and sister—which by Greek standards was incest—into the great inspiration of the reign. It was justified by the *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage) of Zeus and Hera; it was even held to confer on the wedded brother and sister the quality of *Theoi Adelphoi*. Theologians recalled, too, the examples of Isis and Osiris. Politicians and lawyers recalled that marriage between brother and sister had been a requirement of the old Egyptian law of monarchy. Historiographers demonstrated that Ptolemy Sôter had married a daughter of his father in Berenice. From now on, like the Pharaohs, the Lagidae were to marry in the fashion of the gods, either really or by a legal fiction, thus keeping their blood pure from all admixture with mortal men.

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[1] *Philadelphos* means equally 'brother-loving' or 'sister-loving' (Translator).

I will not go into details over the wars of this reign, which were victorious for a long time, especially during the lifetime of Arsinoe II; she seems to have inspired her brother's policy, which was more imperialistic than his father's.

All through the reign these victories were celebrated by splendid festivities and a flood of panegyrics such as had never been seen before. Ptolemy II liked ceremonies and enjoyed incense; so the poets were not sparing with flattery. His love of letters, while it was sincere and enlightened, was not altogether disinterested. But he was not so unaccustomed to culture as his father: in his childhood he had had illustrious masters—at least, learned teachers—the philologist Zenodotus and the poet Philetas of Cos, the author of the first dictionary of the Greek language. Vanity and genuine liking combined to make him a great benefactor of letters. His reign saw the transformation of Greek into Alexandrian literature; his court became the Versailles of antiquity. If poets repaid him in generous encomiums for the pensions he gave them, at least they had had their money's worth.

I shall quote here only one instance of the flunkeydom prevalent in Alexandrian poetry, so different from the tones of friendship mingled with severity in which Pindar, in the classical era, would address a prince to whom he looked for his daily bread. In Theocritus' verses entitled *The Encomium of Ptolemy*, no lustre of poetry is there to redeem the baseness of the flattery. They describe, in absurd fustian, the limitless might of the king, who rules over a thousand lands, in which dwell a thousand nations, who is king of thirty-three thousand, three hundred and thirty-three cities (to reach which amazing total the reader is expected to do some complicated arithmetic)—

Therein of cities builded there stand three centuries
And thousands three, and yet again three tens of thousands more,
Then twice three cities, and beside all these yet three times nine:
In every one the noble-hearted Ptolemy reigns as king.[1]

Total, 33,333!

He is the son of a god and a goddess—this is the first time the poet mentions the double deification of Ptolemy Sôter and Berenice; and he has beaten the lawyers and priests to it. He is spouse (here is the portrait of Arsinoe the emetic) of a

noble queen, than whom a wife more virtuous
Never yet cast her arms around a bridegroom in her bower;
For with her whole heart doth she love her brother and her spouse.[2]

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[1] *The Idylls of Theocritus* translated by R. C. Trevelyan, Cambridge, 1947, p. 59.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

But the object of the longest eulogies in the poem is the abundance of gold—

> *Not idle and useless in his opulent house the gold*
> *Lies heaped together.*

And what nobler use for gold than to reward poets?

> *And to the sacred contests at the feasts of Dionysus,*
> *Comes no man having skill to lift his voice in tuneful song,*
> *Whom he rewards not with some gift worthy of the minstrel's art.*
> *In gratitude for such benefits the prophets of the Muses*
> *Sing Ptolemy's praise.*[1]

A poetry of courtiers, a literature of humble petitions! There would be no need to mention it, were it not that these men were capable of far better things. Note too that this lickspittle vein did not prevent Theocritus later, when he had broken with the Alexandrian court, from inserting in a new poem a hit at 'the woman with three husbands'.

The end of the reign of Ptolemy II, after Arsinoe's death in 270, was less brilliant. He had to give up part of his conquests. He seems, too, to have sunk into deep gloom during his twenty-four years as a widower. He mourned deeply for his sister-spouse, or at least indulged in exhibitions of grief; not that his tears prevented him from keeping numerous mistresses, some of whom he allowed to behave as queens—many lived in state in their own palaces.

Meanwhile, Ptolemy had divine honours bestowed on the dead queen, erecting statues to her in the majority of Egyptian temples until such time as he could build her special Arsinoeums. He did more, and, mixing sentiment and business with a subtlety some have admired, he took advantage of the new cult to divert some of the temple revenues into the royal coffers. He made devout pilgrimages himself to these shrines, using magic rites to breathe immortality into the statues he raised, or rather into her whom they represented. The inscriptions enable us to follow, from month to month and from year to year, these journeys he took in order to preside over apotheosis ceremonies of the goddess Philadelphus. He even founded a temple, in advance, to the *Theoi Adelphoi!*

This kind of cult, one part mysticism, one part politics and one sentiment, was utterly foreign to Hellenic tradition and full of Eastern notions. The Romans were to make skilful use of it later in the service of the idea of Empire. But this was the first time it had manifested itself on such a scale in the Hellenic world.

Ptolemy was terrified of death, and faced old age with reluctance, turning into something of a hypochondriac. For all his real culture and the love for natural science with which he has been credited, his egocentricity and his incredible vanity made him willing to believe anything when his health was involved. What his physicians dared not promise him, he demanded of his magicians. A historian of the period writes of him:

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[1] *Ibid.*

> *He had been so spoilt with flattery that he expected to live for ever. He said that he was the only man to have found the secret of immortality.*

On the contrary, his constitution had never been robust, and now with the years—in which he had practised neither continence nor sobriety—it was weakening. The death he feared, from which he thought to escape in dreams of indefinite survival, came upon him in 246, at the age of sixty-two, in the thirty-ninth year of his reign.

Such were the two monarchs who created the Museum and the Library—the first university in the world.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE REIGN OF BOOKS: ALEXANDRIA, ITS LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

Alexandria, in the last centuries of the ancient world, was a city of immense size. Founded, by a decision of Alexander, at one of the mouths of the Nile on the site of a fishing and pastoral village, but at the intersection of the sea, river and land routes of three continents, it at once became the warehouse of the whole earth, the largest commercial town on earth and, by the same token, for at least three centuries, the cultural capital of the Hellenic world.

An architect and town-planner had laid out the general plan in the lifetime of Alexander; a man already famous for the boldness of his conceptions, named Dinocrates of Rhodes. By him the city was divided into four districts by two great highways, one North-South and one East-West, crossing at the centre. Each of the districts was given the name of one of the first four letters of the Greek alphabet. The more important of the roads, that from East to West, measured seven thousand five hundred metres[1] in a straight line; it was some thirty metres wide, and had footpaths. The North-South road was divided into two spacious carriageways, with a row of trees between.

Inside the four rectangular districts, the other streets were perpendicular or parallel with one another, and fairly narrow—about six metres wide; the cities of antiquity, where traffic was only heavy on festival days, had no great need of wide roads, and narrow ones were best suited to the climate. One great highway sufficed for processions.

Here is the scene in the streets, one festival day in Alexandria, as described by a provincial woman from Syracuse talking to her friend:

> *O ye Gods, what a crowd! How are we ever to get through*
> *This dreadful crush? They're swarming thick as ants, endless and countless.*

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[1] Over 4½ miles.

Many indeed are the good turns you've done us, Ptolemy,
Since your sire joined the immortals. No villain comes creeping up
Behind one in the Egyptian style to rob one in the streets. . . .
[*A column of horsemen*[1] *comes towards the women, who are caught in the press.*]

Sweetest Gorgo! Oh, what will *become of us! Here they are,*
The King's war-horses!—My good man, don't trample on me, please.
Look, that bay's rearing! What a savage brute! Quick, Eunoa, run,
[*Eunoa is the maid*]
You reckless girl! That beast will kill the man who's leading it.
My goodness, what a blessing that I left the child indoors![2]

The vast town of Alexandria came to cover, at the end of the ancient era, an area of almost a hundred square kilometres.[3] It had been built very rapidly, and all in stone, which was a great novelty. For the palaces marble had been imported, since there is none in Egypt. The royal palace of the Ptolemies, called the Broucheion, was surrounded with gardens. To populate the new capital every part of the Hellenic world was drawn on; there were even deportations. When Ptolemy Sôter had taken Jerusalem he moved thousands of Jews to his capital. Fifty years after its foundation it numbered, so it is said, three hundred thousand inhabitants, making it the most populous city in the world; at the beginning of the Christian era it seems to have reached the figure of a million. So it grew upwards within its quadrangular enclosing walls: multi-storied buildings were put up, apartment-houses for letting, such as had never been seen in Greek cities. These tall rented houses of Alexandria are known to us by mosaics and terra-cotta models—great tower-like blocks, some of which rose like skyscrapers.

The wonder of Alexandria was its harbour and its famous Pharos. The site Alexander had chosen was not a particularly suitable natural port; but he had seen that by using the island of Pharos, an excellent one could be created. The island was connected to the mainland by a mole, and contained the naval harbour, arsenals and shipyards, as well as the port personally used by the sovereign. The second and more westerly, known as Eunostos, or Safe-Return, was the commercial harbour. Two openings in the separating mole (crossed by bridges) enabled ships to pass from one harbour to the other. This double port of Alexandria was copied later in several Hellenistic cities.

As for the Pharos, it was the work of an engineer, Sostrates of Cnidus. One hundred and eleven metres high (the spire of Lausanne cathedral is seventy-five metres) its tower had three stories of diminishing girth.[1] The lantern consisted of eight columns supporting a dome, under which burned a fire of resinous wood. It is said that mirrors magnified the light. A lift gave access to the lantern. The Pharos was immediately included among the seven wonders of the world: it was this tower that gave the Arabs the idea of the minaret.

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[1] Or led horses, according to our translation.
[2] *The Idylls of Theocritus*, translated by R. C. Trevelyan, Id. 15, p. 49.
[3] About 40 square miles.

But the Ptolemies reared two beacons into the Alexandrian sky more brilliant than the fires of the Pharos—the poetry and the science of their city.

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Ptolemy Sôter wanted to make his capital the great cultural centre of his time, and wrest the leadership in this field from Athens. He tried to entice poets, savants and philosophers to settle there. Some poets he won over—Philetas of Cos, already mentioned, who became the tutor of Philadelphus, a poet-scholar who was one of the masters of Alexandrian culture, and, in particular, of Theocritus. He also drew in famous physicians, mathematicians and astronomers: but it is noteworthy that with the philosophers his failure was almost complete. Yet they were the men he wanted most; as the Bâle historian Burckhardt has said in his dry way, they, with the diadochi and the courtesans, were the great popular successes of the period. The representatives of the principal schools—Cynic, Stoic, Epicurean—made excuses: through the centuries that followed and until the end of the ancient era, Athens remained the city of philosophers and philosophical studies. Ptolemy only got a single representative of the Peripatetic school—Demetrius of Phalerum, a disciple of Theophrastus the founder of botany, and through him of Theophrastus' master Aristotle. But Theophrastus himself declined to come and lecture in the Museum.

Demetrius of Phalerum took a considerable part in founding this institution. He had led a fairly unsettled life: he was a very popular orator, and he had accepted the government of his own city of Athens under Cassander of Macedonia. With the support of a Macedonian garrison he had been tyrant of Athens for ten years, and shown himself a good administrator; under him Athens had enjoyed a period of material prosperity though not of greatness. He had had statues erected to him like the monarchs of the period; then he had been overthrown and exiled by someone else. After the death of Cassander, his patron, he went to Alexandria, where Ptolemy gave him his confidence and entrusted him with the task of setting up the study of letters, science and the arts in his capital. Of the institutions which became the Museum and Library, the planner was Demetrius.

The idea and name of the Museum were not new: the idea had already been carried out in the Peripatetic school to which Demetrius belonged. It went back as far as Pythagoreanism; Pythagoras had founded a sort of confraternity (a monastery, almost) in which the worship of the Muses symbolized and fostered scientific study and research. The establishments of the Pythagoreans were called museums.

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[1] 111 m. = 364 ft. The spire of Salisbury cathedral is 404 ft. The Bishop Rock Lighthouse, the tallest in existence, is 146 ft. (Translator).

Aristotle and Theophrastus had taken up the idea. Aristotle had proclaimed the need for all savants to cooperate in building up the fabric of science—a fruitful idea which since then, and especially in recent times, has led to the prodigious expansion of modern science as we see it. The *Researches on Animals* would not have attained the results we have described without the help of numerous collaborators. In another field, Aristotle had prepared the way for writing his *Politics* by a vast enquiry into political institutions which embraced one hundred and fifty-eight cities; the hundred and fifty-eight treatises were still extant in antiquity, and one, the most important, the *Constitution of Athens*, was rediscovered at the end of the nineteenth century. Not all of them were composed by Aristotle himself alone; most were by disciples and friends whom he had trained. After him, his successor Theophrastus had organized a *Mouseion* at the Lyceum which was a prototype of the Alexandrian Museum. It contained lecture-rooms, quarters for the teachers, and the famous library brought together by Aristotle.

The scheme of Aristotle and Theophrastus was, then, to group savants and their pupils round a library and collections of scientific specimens so that they could collaborate for the sake of science. Demetrius of Phalerum had only to broaden the scope of their plan with Ptolemy's generous help, to found the Museum and Library.

We are, however, ill-informed about the buildings and organization of the former. Archaeologists have not discovered the site, which is known to us only through the descriptions of ancient writers. (How could one excavate in the heart of Alexandria?) There were lecture-rooms and studies, rooms for the pensioners or fellows of the Museum—the teachers—and a common dining-room. In the course of time, and after Philadelphus particularly since he was a fervent naturalist, were added collections of plants and animals in the grounds, then a rudimentary observatory, and lastly dissecting-rooms. In the Museum we see, then, the first university.

The fellows were savants, poets, and a few philosophers, living in the Museum and drawing a salary from the State to enable them to prosecute their studies in peace, giving at the same time a certain number of lectures. We have no information whatever about the number of students: there may have been several hundred—in a modern text-book I read that they were as many as fourteen thousand, but where this dubious figure comes from I do not know.

As for the fellows-and-tutors, rudely described by an ancient writer as 'poultry fattened in a hen-run', they numbered a hundred. Management of the Museum was in the hands of a high-priest of the Muses and a president—who had only administrative functions and was not a savant. More important was the librarian: several of these officers have had their names recorded by the ancients, but the lists, as handed on to us by authors of the Byzantine period, do not always tally. One such list, recently discovered at Oxyrhyncus in the sands of Egypt, runs as follows for the age of the earliest Ptolemies—Zenodotus, a philologist, Apollonius of Rhodes, a learned poet, Eratosthenes, mathematician and geographer, Aristophanes of Byzantium and Aristarchus of Samothrace, both philologists and literary critics. Another list gives the name of Callimachus, the head of the new poetical school that flourished in Alexandria and himself a poet. This Callimachus played a most important role in the Library. He drew up, in a hundred and twenty volumes (a volume being one roll of papyrus), a 'List of writers who have won fame in every branch of learning, and the books they wrote'—a catalogue of the Library, with biographies and commentaries, in which the books were classified first in literary genres, then in order of merit in each genre; at the same time it was a kind of brief history of Greek literature.

All this brings us to speak of the Library, the glory of the Museum.

Egypt was a land of immemorial culture and of learned collections; there had been libraries even under the old Pharaohs. One of these bore, in the Egyptian language, the inscription 'Sanctuary of the mind'. Certain sovereigns of Assyria and Babylon had them too—we have dug up the cuneiform library of one of them, with its books in brick! But for a long time only rulers had been rich enough to own books.

Aristophanes speaks scoffingly of Euripides' library, and says that the poet made his tragedies of book-juice (like making beef-tea). But the first considerable library to be built up by a private person was Aristotle's, and that had owed its existence to the generous contributions of Alexander.

After the time of Alexander the mass production of papyrus, and later of parchment, and above all the use of educated slaves as copyists, enabled books to be produced more cheaply and in greater numbers. The moment came when a fairly wide public was using books. A little later than the period we are studying was the age of the Greek novel, which implies a wide reading public.

Demetrius of Phalerum purchased enormous numbers of books for the Library. At his request, Ptolemy Philadelphus bought up Aristotle's library from the heirs of Theophrastus. One writer describes vessels arriving from Athens in this prince's reign and dumping great bales of 'volumina' on the quays of Alexandria. At the end of Philadelphus' reign an official report showed four hundred thousand volumes in the Museum, including duplicates, and ninety thousand excluding them. The policy was continued under his successors. His son, Ptolemy III

Euergetes, spared no expense to obtain books that were valuable and rare. Thus, he paid a fabulous sum as deposit to borrow the official copy of the tragic poets, made in Athens in the fourth century B.C. and containing all the works of the great Attic tragedians—then he sacrificed his deposit and kept the copy.

The Library increased not only through purchases of classical works, but also through the prolific production of contemporary authors. A philologist named Didymus wrote three thousand five hundred volumes of commentaries. Even if we admit that a not very extensive work could easily run to several 'volumes'—that is, scrolls—such a rate of production seemed quite redoubtable enough. The ancients admitted that to 'lay' at such a rate one must have entrails of bronze—the surname Chalcenteros, which they gave this Demetrius, means precisely that. And we possess the names of more than eleven hundred writers, including philosophers and scientists, of the Hellenistic age. It was a flood, a catastrophe for literature—production for bulk.

It is said that in 47 B.C., at the time of Caesar's war in Egypt, the Library held seven hundred thousand volumes.

What did it hold? What had been bought? All that was of value in Greek literature, of course. One account says specifically that Philadelphus wrote to his fellow-kings to send him whatever was going in the way of poets, historians, orators and physicians. The scholars of the Museum read, or could read, the whole body of literature, epic, lyric, dramatic, all the historians, and the vast literature of philosophy and medicine. If we have preserved most of the significant works of antiquity, we have not preserved, in quantity, a hundredth or a thousandth part of the whole. Athenaeus could read a hundred plays of what is known as Middle Comedy, of which we have nothing at all, unless the *Plutus* of Aristophanes is to be counted as such.

It has been asked whether the curators obtained any part of the literature of the 'barbarian' peoples, and had it translated. We do know of a few cases of the kind. Thus, in the time of Philadelphus, a Hellenized Egyptian, the priest Manetho, drew on the works in the Library to write a compendium of *Egyptian Antiquities* in Greek; a Chaldean priest, Berosus, similarly wrote a *Chaldaean Antiquities*. So there probably were foreign works in the Library, whether translated or not.

The most important translation was what we call the Septuagint (or translation of the Seventy), a Greek version of the sacred books of the Jews—our Old Testament. According to Jewish tradition, Ptolemy Philadelphus called together seventy learned Jews and asked them to translate their scriptures into Greek; but that is legend—in fact the task spread over a long period: the Pentateuch was only finished in the third century, the Prophets and Psalms in the second, and *Ecclesi-*

astes about A.D. 100. The existence of such a translation shows at least that the Jews were very numerous in Egypt, and that a large part of them had forgotten their own language. There were indeed several hundred thousand Hellenized Jews in Alexandria.

Finally it should not be forgotten that the Library contained spurious works, and quantities of them. One part of the task of the Alexandrian philologists—Zenodotus and others—was to be the winnowing of true from false in the vast mass of books in the Library. Zenodotus for his part set about emending the text of the Homeric poems, marking the lines or passages he considered to be interpolated with a special sign (a dash suggesting a cook's spit, hence called an *obelus*). Modern editions take note of his condemnation of certain passages as late or dubious in origin. Other philologists did the same for the tragic poets, and more generally for the whole of Greek literature. Thus the Museum and Library saw the birth of textual criticism.

At the same time, and among the same circles, we witness a prolific crop of lexicons of rare or archaic words, volumes of commentary or literary criticism, grammatical treatises—whatever might serve to elucidate or make more accessible a literature and a language already illustrious by five or six centuries of great works. The scholars of the Museum and Library boldly faced this unrewarding and necessary toil.

It will not be superfluous to indicate at this point what was the future destiny of these two great Alexandrian institutions, and how long they endured. A century and a half after their foundation, both passed through a grave crisis. It was during the reign of Ptolemy VIII or Euergetes II, who was known to his subjects as Cacergetes (Euergetes signifies Benefactor, so it will be apparent that Cacergetes means the opposite). He was a man guilty of the most abominable crimes—he had murdered his own son and sent the pieces as a birthday present to his wife. After being expelled from his capital, he returned in the course of a civil war, put Alexandria to fire and sword, and proscribed and scattered the fellows of the Museum. Athenaeus relates in this connexion that then there were seen 'great numbers of grammarians, philosophers, geographers and physicians roaming the entire world, obliged to earn their living by teaching'. It is like reading an account of the dispersal of Byzantine scholars and artists at the capture of Constantinople by the Turks. However this extraordinary Ptolemy, who had a taste for letters and bore among his other titles that of Philologus, no less, reconstituted the teaching body in the Museum. It was he, too, who invented an original measure of war to help the Alexandrian Library in its rivalry with that of Pergamum—he prohibited the export of Egyptian papyrus. To this prohibition Pergamum replied by inventing parchment, a writing-surface formed of sheepskin, goatskin

27. *Egyptian landscape, Fayum*

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or calfskin, and wearing better than papyrus; and the book trade reached still greater dimensions.

The Museum's day of glory was already over. At this period—the end of the second century—there are no more great names to be found among its fellows. Its greatness lasted little more than a century and a half, corresponding to the reign of the first five or six Ptolemies. After that its usefulness as an institution had gone. A few Roman emperors still took an interest in it. Suetonius tells us that Claudius founded a new Museum: it is true that he fancied himself as a writer, and had composed an *Antiquities of Etruria*. He also ordered his writings to be read in Alexandria once a year in the presence of a large audience. By then the Museum had sunk to the status of an academy, out of touch with the trends of literature and thought.

One of the principal causes of its decline was the advance of Christianity. The scientific teaching which was still given there in the early centuries of our era remained attached to polytheism. Hypatia, the learned woman mathematician and philosopher, was among the teachers about the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth centuries. But one day in the year 415 a mob fired with fanatical fury by monks invaded the unhappy woman's house, dragged her out and tore her fair body to pieces before the patriarch Cyril had time to intervene.

As for the Library, a tradition still found in history-books records that it was burnt for the first time during Caesar's campaign in Egypt, in 47 B.C. This tradition is now contested. It depends mainly on the testimony of a passage in the historian Dio Cassius, which says no more than that some *apothekai* of books were burnt, adding 'so it is asserted'. The word used means 'stocks' or 'stores', and is unlikely to refer to the Library. They may have been bookshops, or simply bales of books on the wharves waiting to be taken away by Caesar when the fire broke out. Caesar says himself that he had set fire to the Alexandrian fleet, and that the fire had spread to the buildings near the wharves. Quite likely the ancients improved the story and made the flames devour the Library for rhetorical effect. Antony on this occasion, whether to make good the damage or to gain favour with Cleopatra, presented her with two hundred thousand volumes from the library of Pergamum.

Very much later, the Library certainly was burnt down together with the Museum and the Broucheion. It was in A.D. 273, in the time of the Emperor Aurelian, during his war against Zenobia, queen of Palmyra. (She had built up a vast Empire in the East, and was finally captured by Aurelian after a long pursuit on camel-back, to be exhibited in the triumph he celebrated in Rome.)

After that the Library was reconstituted yet once more, in a once more restored Museum. Even in 640, when the Arabs seized the city, it is not certain that either had ceased to exist; it is difficult to set a date for the disappearance of either of them. After ten centuries of existence, the mark they left in human memory was

28. *Egyptian bas-relief, Karnak*

so deep that their legend, or history, still loomed over any revival of civilization, far into the Middle Ages. Thanks to its long survival, Alexandria became the first arch of a bridge joining antiquity and the modern age.

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It must be said too that during the earliest centuries of that existence (the second and third B.C.), the Museum and Library made their mark on the whole of Hellenistic civilization, for good and for ill.

For good, undoubtedly, in the field of science. The idea of Aristotle which, as I have told, gave them birth, was that science is the fruit of collaboration—advancing through the collective endeavour of generations. The work of art, on the other hand, and the work of literature, while owing much to tradition, to the times and the environment, are nevertheless essentially acts of individual genius and may spring up both unheralded and entire, unlike scientific discovery which is always collective and always incomplete. Scientific genius is also indispensable to the progress of science, but it fits into that progress like a link to which the next link must be joined.

Aristotle had embarked science upon a universal enquiry into the nature of the world and the nature of man; a patient enquiry, carried out in the spirit of respect for fact. Its success depended on collecting and classifying the greatest possible number of facts, then building up an explanation of them. The savants of the Museum professed no specific philosophy, not even that of Aristotle. They had not borrowed a metaphysic from him, only an orientation and a working method. So the Museum was, not a philosophical school like the Stoic Porch, the Platonist Academy and the Aristotelian Lyceum, but a real university. Science was being built up in Alexandria, and the process could advance rapidly since all the costly scientific equipment necessary was placed at the disposal of researchers by the Egyptian kings—a library, museum collections and laboratories.

It is therefore not surprising that the great names connected with the Museum and with the Alexandrian epoch are names of savants rather than of poets. It was in the Museum that the great mathematicians of the third and second centuries lived and taught—Euclid, the most widely known because he gave the final touch to the method of elementary geometry in a treatise written in an admirably stripped and exact style, but not the most inspired; Apollonius of Perga, and Hipparchus, on whom I shall not dwell because I dislike using language I do not understand. A word only on Apollonius: he wrote a book studying the properties of conic sections; Hipparchus invented trigonometry. Archimedes, one of the greatest scientific minds of all time, while he lived as much in Syracuse as Alexandria, was educated in the Museum, and brought out his works at Alexandria. It was in the

Museum too that the greatest astronomers of the age taught. Aristarchus of Samos, the Copernicus of antiquity, and also Hipparchus, a marvellous observer of the heavens who listed (without a telescope, needless to say) more than eight hundred and fifty fixed stars, and discovered the precession of the equinoxes. There were also great physicians, such as Herophilus of Chalcedon, who discovered the nervous and the arterial systems, and had intuitions of the circulation of the blood, which was not rediscovered, or fully discovered, until the seventeenth century. Another teacher of the Museum was that all-round scientist Eratosthenes, the mathematician and geographer, who measured the circumference of the earth. With these we must not forget the great philologists already named, Zenodotus, Aristophanes of Byzantium, and Aristarchus of Samos, the founders of textual criticism.

This catalogue may seem pointless; but it is not, if it helps to give some idea of the scope and volume of scientific research in the great days of the Museum, when it was one of the principal factors in scientific progress.

But if Museum and Library rendered great service to science, what did they give to Alexandrian poetry? Does it owe them very much besides certain of its vices? It was born, or at least it lived, in the shadow of the Museum. Its leader Callimachus, the theorist, the Malherbe of the new poetry, lived many years there, and drew up the catalogue raisonné of the Library. The epic poet Apollonius of Rhodes held the office of librarian. These poets all had pretensions—all, or nearly all, even Theocritus—to erudition; an erudition often ill-digested, which of course could not fail to affect their poetry. It poisoned a good part of it. There was no reason why they should not share their contemporaries' liking for recondite studies; but they made the mistake of transferring this liking into genres of poetry where it is out of place unless perfectly assimilated. The poem of Apollonius is of great beauty in places, but it is infested with learned comments and annotations, which form part of the text itself; the poet forgets his characters and his story while he explains to the reader the etymology of a place-name (incorrectly, of course) or the origin of some custom still kept up in his day (incorrectly, again), or else perhaps lectures the inhabitants of some town on the Black Sea on their mistake (in his view) in honouring a hero who has no real connexion with their locality. Such comments, with which his poem is riddled from end to end, are bound to demolish all poetic illusion; Apollonius the pedant and librarian continually breaks up the world created by Apollonius the poet. Callimachus, still more learned than Apollonius and perhaps less of a poet, leaves a less marked sense of incongruity; in him the learned matter is in some respects better adapted to the poetic theme. But what a superfluity of recondite allusions his works contain, allusions which required in the reader of antiquity no less than of today, a grounding in mythology, history, geography, astronomy—a complete bookish education, plus a scientific training: one or more university degrees, we might say. The weight was far too heavy for a poetic inspiration which in itself was somewhat faltering. Undoubtedly the Museum and Library had an unfortunate influence on literature: they ushered in the supremacy of books.

These poets had read too much, unrolled too many 'volumina' in the reading-room of their Library; they tried to make inspiration an actual product of reading. 'Reading', writes Apollonius, 'is the substance of style.' In another passage he calls himself 'the secretary of the Muses' (the word is only too revealing). And Callimachus asserts 'I sing nothing without witnesses'—that is, without documentary evidence. It is only too true: whatever topic they choose, their first act is to document themselves, to go right through the literature on the subject. With the result that some of their work tastes stale, as re-hashed matter must.

The Alexandrian period was not entirely lacking in men endowed with the poetic temperament. But, after the residence put in by its writers at the Museum and Library, we can be sure in advance that Alexandrian poetry was a poetry, of poets it may be, but assuredly of *literati.*

CHAPTER TWELVE

ALEXANDRIAN ASTRONOMY: ARISTARCHUS OF SAMOS

Science had begun in seventh-century Ionia, with Thales. In the classical age it flourished brilliantly with Democritus, with Hippocrates and the school of Cos, and with Thucydides (three exact contemporaries each having been born in 460). But the Alexandrian period, the third and second centuries, saw its most intense and glorious activity. In that last phase of Greek civilization, men's spiritual energies, the genius of inventors, the curiosity of the public—everything which had called out and supported artistic creation in the classical age, to produce the great temples and the effulgent spirit of tragedy—was moving now, with enthusiasm almost as great but differently directed (and less widespread, admittedly) towards scientific discovery. Aristarchus of Samos and Archimedes have fully as much genius as Aeschylus or Phidias, but the object of their endeavour is different—they are not creating a new architecture, they are not remoulding the universe in tragic trilogies: they are raising the edifice of science and finding explanations for the physical world.

This was what roused men to enthusiasm, or at least the most cultured among them. One result was that the poets' public grew smaller, and poetry had no place in the mainstream of spiritual forces in this period. Classical poetry had been a poetry of the market-place, a poetry of the crowd: Alexandrian poetry is chamber-poetry. The great savants may not perhaps have drawn the masses, but at least they were the great stars of their day. More than that—they held in their hands as they worked the future of humanity.

I shall try to introduce a few typical activities of Alexandrian science; and first astronomy, which was the first-born of all human sciences because it is the most necessary to the countryman and the mariner, and was born in Greece, because the Greeks were mariners and countryfolk.

But we must go back a little. From the earliest beginnings of Greek thought, with Thales of Miletus and the Ionian school, savants have sought to account for celestial phenomena. Before them, it is true, the Babylonians had observed the heavens, and drawn up the list of the five planets Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, and of the principal constellations. These Babylonians were admirable observers, and over the centuries they had accumulated a vast body of facts; their observations, thanks to the contacts set up by Alexander between the Greek world and Chaldea, were put to use by the savants of Alexandria. But modern historians of science admit that Babylonian astronomy was rather a body of observations than a genuine science and an explanation, true or tentative, of appearances—or, as Greek calls them, 'phenomena'. It is possible to come to know with some accuracy the movement of a planet, with its periods of immobility and retrogression relatively to the visible heavens, and even to predict this movement, without being able, or even feeling any desire, to find a reason for it. Whereas Greek astronomy, from its beginnings, was distinguished by its attempts to account for phenomena.

Explanations were abundant from the start: they were wrong, naturally, but they were not absurd, and above all they avoided bringing in the supernatural. They were rational. The questions the Greek savant asked were, in particular: what causes day and night? what causes the seasons? what causes the irregular movement of the planets in the visible sky—the eclipses of the sun and moon—the phases of the moon? Problems which seem simple to us only because they were solved four centuries or more ago.

These explanations were abundant, then, as early as the sixth century in Greek thought. One man imagined the earth as a flat disc, a tray with a raised rim behind which the sun journeyed from West to East every night. For another, sun and moon were flaming clouds that crossed the sky from East to West and then 'fell into a hole'; next day a new sun and new stars blazed into view. For another again, the moon was a kind of vessel filled with fire, which turned towards us sometimes its lighted interior—when it was at the full—and sometimes its dark outside; the position of the vessel gave rise to the phases of the moon, and also its eclipses. For yet another, eclipses are caused by opaque bodies composed of earth, which move through the heavens unknown to us—and so on.

These are beginnings: the explanations strike us as childish. But they did endeavour to fit the facts. I have purposely quoted only those that were wrong; but as well as these incorrect hypotheses, others were formulated which were correct. Anaxagoras, in the fifth century, gave the true explanation of the phases and the eclipses of the moon.

The great question on which almost everything else turned was the shape of the earth, and, more important, its position in the universe. The majority of ancient astronomers looked on it as a disc laid on water or hanging in air. All, or nearly all, up to the Alexandrian era, put the earth in the centre of the universe, with everything else revolving round it. Geocentricity weighed heavily on almost the whole of ancient astronomy.

Up to the Alexandrian era it was the Pythagorean school that did most to solve the double problem—that, let me repeat, of the shape and position of the earth.

It was the first to affirm—perhaps as early as the sixth century—that the earth is round. Partly perhaps for ideological reasons, so to speak—because the sphere was considered a 'perfect' figure on account of its absolute symmetry; but partly also because these men realized that the earth's shadow caused lunar eclipses, and saw that it was the shadow of a round body.

It was in the Pythagorean school too that the movements of the sun and the planets were clearly seen to be a combination of two different movements. One of these has the duration of one day, is from East to West (like that of the stars), and has an axis running from the pole star to the centre of the earth; this movement takes place on the plane of the celestial (or the terrestrial) equator. The other movement of sun and planets is an annual movement, taking place in the opposite direction to the first, and on a different plane, which is known as the plane of the ecliptic. We know that these two apparent movements correspond to the double movement of the earth, the daily rotation on its own axis and the yearly rotation round the sun: Pythagoras and his school did not discover the explanation at once, but they stated the problem correctly, saying 'this is what is observed, and what needs to be explained'. The reason why these earliest Pythagoreans did not find the explanation was simply that they still looked on the earth as the motionless centre of the universe.

Philolaus, a disciple of Pythagoras, was the first to make the earth move and to take it away from the centre of things. His theory was a singular one: in the centre of his system he put, not the sun, but another star named the Central Fire, round which our earth turns in twenty-four hours; but we never see it because our terrestrial sphere always presents its uninhabited hemisphere to it, the inhabited hemisphere facing outwards towards the celestial sphere. This hypothesis does at least give an approximately true representation of the phenomenon of day and night; for Philolaus' earth, turning in a twenty-four-hour orbit round the Central Fire, shows each of its two faces alternately to the sun and to the starry night sky, which is motionless in his system, and hence comes the apparent daily movement of sun and stars, explained for the first time by a movement of earth, not of sun and stars.

Philolaus had unnecessarily complicated his universe by assuming the existence of a body invisible to us, turning with the earth, and on the same orbit, round the Central Fire, but diametrically opposite to the earth, so that our inhabited regions turn their back to it. This body is called Anti-earth: it seems to have been spirited up in order to raise to the 'perfect number' of ten the spheres of heavenly bodies existing round the Central Fire—the starry sphere, sun, moon, the five known planets, earth and Anti-earth. Here we have a striking example of how the ancient astronomers were led astray by preconceived ideas of 'perfect' numbers or figures.

Meanwhile two Pythagoreans, later than Philolaus, got rid of the Anti-earth, put the Central Fire in the middle of the earth and put the earth back in the centre of the universe, but this time they made it revolve on itself once a day.

And so, in a number of stages—over about two centuries—the Pythagorean school had discovered and taught that the earth is round and rotates on itself. Besides the theory of Philolaus, according to which the sun revolves round the Central Fire, the fruitful idea had been placed on record that the earth is not necessarily the centre of the universe.

At last, towards the end of the fourth century, a Peripatetic named Heraclides of Pontus sketched out the heliocentric hypothesis which Aristarchus of Samos was to make his own. Heraclides was trying to explain the shockingly irregular conduct of the planets which are observed, from the earth, to advance, stop, and retrogress in the sky for no evident reason. Of all the planets, those that behave most oddly from our point of view, if we insist on trying to make them revolve round the earth, are Mercury and Venus, which are placed between us and the sun and therefore cannot possibly appear to revolve round us; whereas the planets further from the sun than we are, may, as they revolve round it, seem to be revolving round us if we stretch a point. Heraclides gives the simple and correct account of the behaviour of Mercury and Venus—that they turn round the sun. So his is the beginning of a heliocentric system: but he goes on asserting that the sun turns round the earth—in a yearly orbit of course, not a daily, since the earth's turning on itself accounts for the sun's daily movement.

And so we come to the hypothesis of Aristarchus of Samos. This great scientist lived in the reigns of the first three Ptolemies, from 310 to 230, spent the greater part of his life in Alexandria, taught at the Museum, and published numerous works. That in which he set out his heliocentric system has not been preserved to us: all we have is one entitled *On the sizes and distances of the Sun and the Moon*. In it he maintains—and this is the first time in the whole of antiquity—that the sun is much larger than the earth, some three hundred times as large. (It is in fact one million, three hundred thousand times.) For Anaxagoras in the fifth century, for example, bold as his theories were, the sun was still much smaller than earth and moon—'as big as the Peloponnese'.

It was probably this new conception of the sun's size, together with the partial heliocentric theory of Heraclides, that led Aristarchus to put forward a heliocentric system. It seemed strange to have turning round the earth a body three hundred times larger than itself. According to our second-hand sources, of which the most important are Archimedes and Plutarch, he formulated his hypothesis in absolutely plain terms: 'that the earth is a planet which revolves about the sun like the other planets, completing its revolution in a year'. The sun is a fixed star; the other stars are fixed too. On the other hand Aristarchus taught that there is not only a great distance between the earth and the sun, but a still more immense distance between the sun and the other fixed stars. He proved this geometrically, by observing that if one takes two points on earth sufficiently far apart, one can make them the base of a triangle of which the sun is the apex, while with the stars it is impossible to do this because the length of the base is zero in comparison with the height, which is practically infinite. He also stated that the diameter of the earth's orbit is negligible in comparison with the diameter of the sphere in which he placed the fixed stars.

Such roughly is the system of Aristarchus—he conceives of the earth as a planet turning on itself in a day, and round the sun in a year, in a circular orbit. It will be seen that this is exactly the system of Copernicus, including his error in giving the earth and the other planets a circular motion of translation around the sun.

This is, however, no mere coincidence. Copernicus knew the theory of Aristarchus as well as the other astronomical systems of antiquity; he says so in 1539, in the book entitled *Of the Revolutions of Heavenly Bodies* which sets out his own theory. He quotes in particular Philolaus, Heraclides and Aristarchus, adding, 'These passages led me to think in my turn about the possibility that the earth moves.' It is a passage which does credit to Copernicus' modesty and honesty, at the same time as it bears striking testimony to the part played by the science of antiquity in the birth of modern science.

It is interesting to note that Aristarchus was not widely accepted in his age. Apart from one astronomer of the century following, of whom we know practically nothing, the ancients quote his hypothesis only to attack it. We would have expected it to cause a revolution in astronomical conceptions: but it came up against opposition—as later did that of Copernicus, which did not win the day without a struggle—sometimes from popular and religious prejudice, and sometimes from very serious arguments of a scientific nature.

Among the popular prejudices were those inspired by human conceit, which likes to think that the earth is at the centre of everything. Religious beliefs were offended when the earth was treated as a planet—and to do away with all distinction between terrestrial matter, which is perishable, and the stars, whose essence is incorruptible and divine and which were looked on as gods, this was impiety. Anaxagoras had been condemned by an Athenian court for asserting that the sun was a red-hot stone and the moon a world. The cult of the stars was in great favour in the third century, under the influence of Stoicism, which gave it an important place in its pantheistic world-view, and under that of astrology also, which was at that moment invading the Greek world from the East. Among the opponents of Aristarchus who took their stand on religious philosophy was the great Stoic Cleanthes, who proclaimed that Aristarchus ought to be indicted for making the earth move—'making that move which by its nature is immovable!' A weighty argument indeed.

But the main reason of Aristarchus' failure was the opposition of the most important members of the learned world, Archimedes, Apollonius of Perga, and Hipparchus in the following century. These savants stated that the theory did not take proper account of appearances or 'phenomena': 'the phenomena must be saved', according to Hipparchus, and the principle—meaning that we must take account of the facts as we observe them—is right. It was not enough to launch a hypothesis, one had to ask if it fitted the facts. So the savants opposed Aristarchus in the name of strict scientific method.

The reason was that his theory said that the planets turned in circles round the sun. Now we know that the orbits of the planets are ellipses; so a very conscientious observer like Hipparchus found 'errors' in their movements when he tried to explain them by Aristarchus' hypothesis. It was for the same reason, in the sixteeenth century, that Copernicus was opposed by an observer like Tycho Brahe, who was for putting the earth back in the centre of the system and making the sun turn round the earth while the other planets turned round the sun. Copernicus' system only corresponded to appearances after Kepler had discovered the elliptical orbits of the planets and the earth, and formulated his law—'the orbits of the planets are ellipses of which the sun is one of the foci'.

It is a pity that the savants opposed to Aristarchus had no occasion to make Kepler's discovery. But the prejudice in favour of circular motion was so deep-rooted that no attack was made on this point: the circular orbits were retained, and the heliocentric system was given up for the geocentric. Thus science fell back into a twofold mistake; but the mistake, by dint of highly complicated theories, was somehow made to fit in with appearances.

To do this astronomers evolved two systems which later combined, the theory of eccentrics and the theory of epicycles. They are most ingenious, particularly the second, which consisted in supposing a given heavenly body to revolve, not directly round the earth, but round a point which at the same time was itself revolving round the earth. The system could be further complicated by imagining a series of successive epicycles. In this way was it possible to find a mathematical explanation for the apparent inequalities in the motions of the planets, including their periods of immobility and retrogression—for obviously, if we make a planet describe an arc of which the centre is itself moving in the opposite direction as seen from the earth, the planet, from the earth, will seem to be stationary.

But it has truly been said that this theory was an invention of astronomers who were mathematicians rather than physicists. No physicist would ever have conceived the idea of stars that turned, not around real bodies, but around imaginary points.

With an instrument as flexible as the theory of epicycles, scientists did not fear to accept appearances, all appearances, as realities. They came back not only to a geocentric universe, but to a motionless earth in the centre of things. That is to say, they gave up not only Aristarchus' theory, but the Pythagorean system by which the earth rotated on its own axis. The prestige of Aristotle, who had maintained that the earth was immobile, had much to do with this.

The twofold belief in geocentricity and the immobility of the earth was universal at the close of antiquity. The system of Claudius Ptolemaeus (or Ptolemy), who lived in the second century A.D., and summed up the state of opinion in astronomy at that date without adding anything new of his own, handed on the belief to the Middle Ages and the Roman Church, which did not abandon it until the nineteenth century. It is well known that in 1615 Galileo was cited to appear before the Inquisition in Rome for having maintained the theory of Copernicus, and forced to abjure it. The proposition that the earth turns on its own axis and around the sun was solemnly declared false and heretical, and Copernicus' book placed on the Index of prohibited books. It was not until 1822 that the Church for the first time declared lawful the printing of works teaching the movement of the earth.

I shall not linger over other Alexandrian astronomers. Hipparchus is a very great name; but his discovery, the precession of the equinoxes, is too technical in character for me to hazard a reference to it. He was in any case an observer above all; he carried out the Herculean task of accurately charting the fixed stars—and that with instruments which were still primitive. His chart, as I have already mentioned, contained more than 850 stars. This done, he compared his observations with those of the Babylonians many centuries before him. It was by these comparisons that he was led to his great discovery.

After Hipparchus and the end of the second century B.C. there were no new discoveries in astronomy, and it may be said that scientific astronomy died. The Romans turned away from this useless science; certain of their great writers show quite surprising ignorance on the subject—Lucretius asks, as if he was still in the age of old Xenophanes, whether the moon we see one day is the same as that of the day before, and a passage of Tacitus seems to show that he was unaware the earth is round.

Long before that date astronomy had given way to a pseudo-science of the heavens, astrology. Of that I shall not speak; it was a Chaldaean religion which had been transplanted into the Hellenistic world and had taken on, in that environment of mathematicians and other savants, a deceptively scientific air.

The world had to wait for the Renaissance to see a new start made with astronomy, on the foundations laid by Greeks.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

GEOGRAPHY: PYTHEAS AND ERATOSTHENES

After the heavens, the earth.

Alexander's expedition had opened up a period of exploration and of geographical research. The curiosity of men and the greed of traders were equally stimulated by the tales of those who had been with Alexander: and no less the appetite of savants for exact information, about the extent of the earth, about land and sea routes. Among the many voyages undertaken in the third century there were not only trading expeditions but also genuine scientific expeditions. The great design of the geographers was to obtain as accurate accounts as possible from voyagers, and from them to draw up a map of the world, while at the same time collecting a multitude of details about the manners of the natives and the products of the lands discovered.

Of many geographers of the time, I shall choose to introduce here only two—one a traveller, a discoverer of unknown lands, the explorer of an ocean route, as well as a savant; the other a geographer who was a mathematician, a cartographer. The first is Pytheas, the second Eratosthenes.

Pytheas came from Marseilles (Massilia), and had no connexion with Alexandria; but his works were read and used by the savants there. His voyage coincided with the last years of the reign of Alexander. He discovered the Tin Sea and the Amber Sea in the West at the same time as Alexander was discovering India in the East. His object was to reconnoitre the tin and amber trade routes, and the countries bordering on the Channel (Tin Sea) and North Sea (Amber Sea). Before him only the Phoenicians had penetrated these regions; he was the first Greek to traverse and describe them.

It is interesting to note that Pytheas had been commissioned to make this exploration by the Republic of Marseilles, which received considerable wealth from these Northern parts. This is an unusual fact, a fact probably unexampled up to his time. The savant in ancient society remained an independent individual, whose activity was not seen as a function of society; and no scientific worker or researcher received any material assistance from his community.

Pytheas left Cadiz in the spring (of what year is uncertain—his voyage has been dated between 328 and 321. His work is lost, and we know of it only through the later geographer Strabo, who made abundant use of it). He followed the coasts of the Iberian peninsula, then sailed straight across the Bay of Biscay towards the headlands of Brittany. From Cadiz to the isle of Ushant, he took eight days; and from there onwards he entered unknown regions. He slowed up his pace because he was nearing the Tin Sea. He observed and noted down the islands he encountered and the names of the peoples. From their language he suspected that he was still in Celtic lands forming the hinterland of Marseilles. He was the first Greek to sail round Gaul—and we must not forget that this was nearly three centuries before Caesar.

The Land of Tin was Cornwall. He landed there. After having so far followed Phoenician and Carthaginian routes, he wanted now to reconnoitre Britain. So for six weeks (in April and May) he coasted up the Western shores of Great Britain, through the Irish Sea, as far as the northern tip of Scotland. He tells us that Britain is a large triangular island, bigger than Sicily. More than once he disembarked on the shore, measured the height of the tide and noted the manners of the natives.

After that Pytheas returned to the English Channel, either by the same route, or, more probably, by the Eastern coast of Britain. Then he stood out into the Amber Sea, leaving the coasts of Kent (Kantion)—the 'white coasts' as he also calls them, the famous chalk cliffs around Dover. He crossed the North Sea, and a week later reached the mouth of a great river which must have been the Elbe. Then he stayed in a group of islands, most likely the Frisian Isles and perhaps Heligoland; he was probably collecting yellow amber, which is, as is well known, the fossilized resin of pine-trees from the tertiary age. Some historians believe that the Amber Sea was the Baltic: but it could not have been if we accept the account of Pytheas.

After spending May and June in the Amber Isles, Pytheas sailed on, in the direction of the Great Bear. After seven days he saw Jutland, which he took for an island, and sailed along its coast; and then towards a new country, across what he calls the Great Strait—no doubt the entry of the Skagerrak. He did not sail up it, but crossing it from South to North came to a country with very high cliffs and coasted along them towards the North. The inhabitants of this unknown land called it Thule: it must have been Norway.

In Thule Pytheas stayed for some time, travelling about the country sometimes by land and sometimes by water. He accurately describes what we call a 'fjord'. In this way he came to Trondhjem, and was shown the place where the sun rests during the long winter nights. He heard that in winter, in the North of the country, the sun hardly appeared at all above the horizon. Pytheas himself, in the summer, experienced nights of two or three hours and days of twenty-one to twenty-two.

He observed the current we call the gulf-stream, which flows from the tropics and warms the waters of the North Atlantic. He noted that the natives of Thule were not savages, that they harvested fruits, oats and wheat, made bread and fermented liquors, and in the South knew honey. He took a few of them on board as pilots, and tried to teach them to be interpreters; then he pushed on further North. But not many more days passed before he had to turn back, because as he put it 'the sea was not water any more, nor air'. The expression has been interpreted in different ways: some think Pytheas was checked by mists, others that he came up against the Great Ice Barrier. Strabo, possibly quoting Pytheas, speaks of the sea being 'frozen' in the North, but in another passage drawn from Pytheas a reference to the 'sea lung' seems rather to suggest icy fog—since 'sea lung' seems to have been a term used for thick fogs, supposed to be thrown out by the sea's 'breathing'.

However that may be, he gave up the attempt to get further North; he had reached what the ancients called the 'Sea of Saturn', that is, the maritime region impossible to navigation. He returned to Marseilles in October after a voyage of eight months, though he had been actually at sea only a hundred and fifteen or a hundred and sixteen days.

The ancients could read two works by Pytheas. *Περὶ τοῦ Ωκεανοῦ* (*Concerning the Ocean*) was the relation of his voyage: and another book, the title of which may be translated *Around the World*, was a summary or digest of the geographical knowledge of the age.

These were the works, as I have said, of a traveller, a trader and a savant all in one. Pytheas was interested in foreign ways of life, like Herodotus and the old chroniclers. He took down anything that concerned the trade of Marseilles, the countries of origin of commodities, the sites of markets. But his work also contained many details which were specifically scientific: thus wherever he put in, he determined the latitude and longitude of each place and noted also the distance from one to the next—so he was working towards the drawing up of a chart. The latitude of Marseilles was determined by him with complete accuracy. He also enquired into the height of tides, and he was the first scientist to note a correspondence between tides and the phases of the moon. His books were much appreciated by the geographers of the Hellenistic era. Hipparchus, at once a mathematician, an astronomer and a cartographer, and that scientist of universal interests Eratosthenes, both thought highly of them.

But a reaction set in later, particularly among geographers influenced by Rome. It must be explained that the Romans promptly forgot the sea routes that Pytheas had opened up: if they reached the coasts of the Amber Sea, it was over land. So, without hesitation Pytheas was branded as a liar. The signal for the offensive was given early by Polybius, and Strabo followed, forcing the note still more. But today it is admitted that Pytheas was an accurate and honest observer.

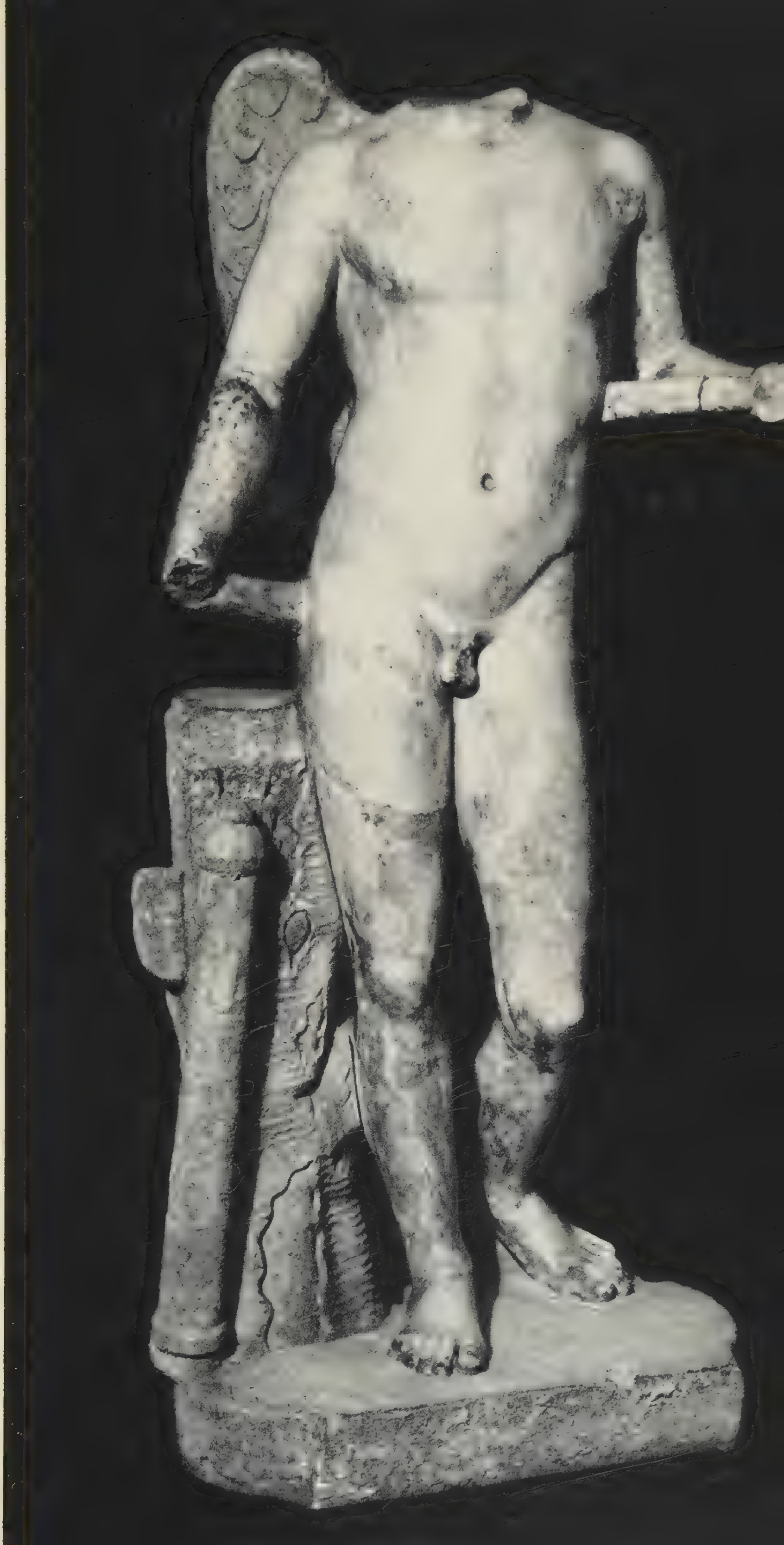
It is true that, later still, he was used by the Greek novelists. This unexpected progeny has done him no good in the opinions of the learned. The writers of tales of adventure, numerous after the opening of the Christian era, used the lands described by Pytheas as settings for their stories; but, in so doing they mixed the accurate descriptions of Pytheas with all kinds of tales of varied origins, including even Indian folk-tales known to us by the Arabian versions of Sindbad the Sailor. So they made the places he had portrayed into the habitat of imaginary peoples such as the Hyperboreans of ancient Greek poetry: and from then on, the exact site of Thule was forgotten. Thule was thought to be Iceland—the Middle Ages continued the error, and some moderns still cherish it: but neither the dimensions of Thule as given by Pytheas, nor the manner of life, nor its natural products, can be made to fit Iceland.

Such was Pytheas, an adventurer, a discoverer of lands and seas, a far more attractive figure than the Jason who leads the expedition of the Argonauts (if he does lead it) in Apollonius of Rhodes, and a better qualified scientist than the learned Apollonius himself.

He was not the only one of his type at the time. I will mention two or three others rapidly, to fill in this picture of the fever for adventure and discovery of the period. There was Euthydemus, another Marseillais who coasted along the Atlantic shore of Africa and reached the mouths of the Senegal. There was Hippalus, in the reign of Ptolemy Sôter, who left from a port named Berenice on the Red Sea to trade in the Indies, and had the idea, as he emerged from the Red Sea, of letting himself be carried out to sea by the monsoon instead of keeping near the shore. He landed at the Malabar coast, and from that time the traders used the monsoon to carry them in either direction, and its regular flow and regular return bore them like a tidal river. In July they left for the Indies, in December they returned to Egypt; Berenice was twenty days from Malabar.

Hippalus had opened up a route to India which was still serving the Middle Ages until Vasco da Gama. But antiquity had a precursor of Vasco too, in the person of Eudoxus of Cyzicus. This sailor was in the service of the Ptolemies, and had made the voyage to India for them several times when he conceived the idea of trying to find a new route by Gibraltar and the southern tip of Africa; but the Ptolemies, who had gained a monopoly of trade with eastern Asia, feared that he would set up

29. *The Eros of Nikopol (2nd Century B.C.) Sofia Museum*



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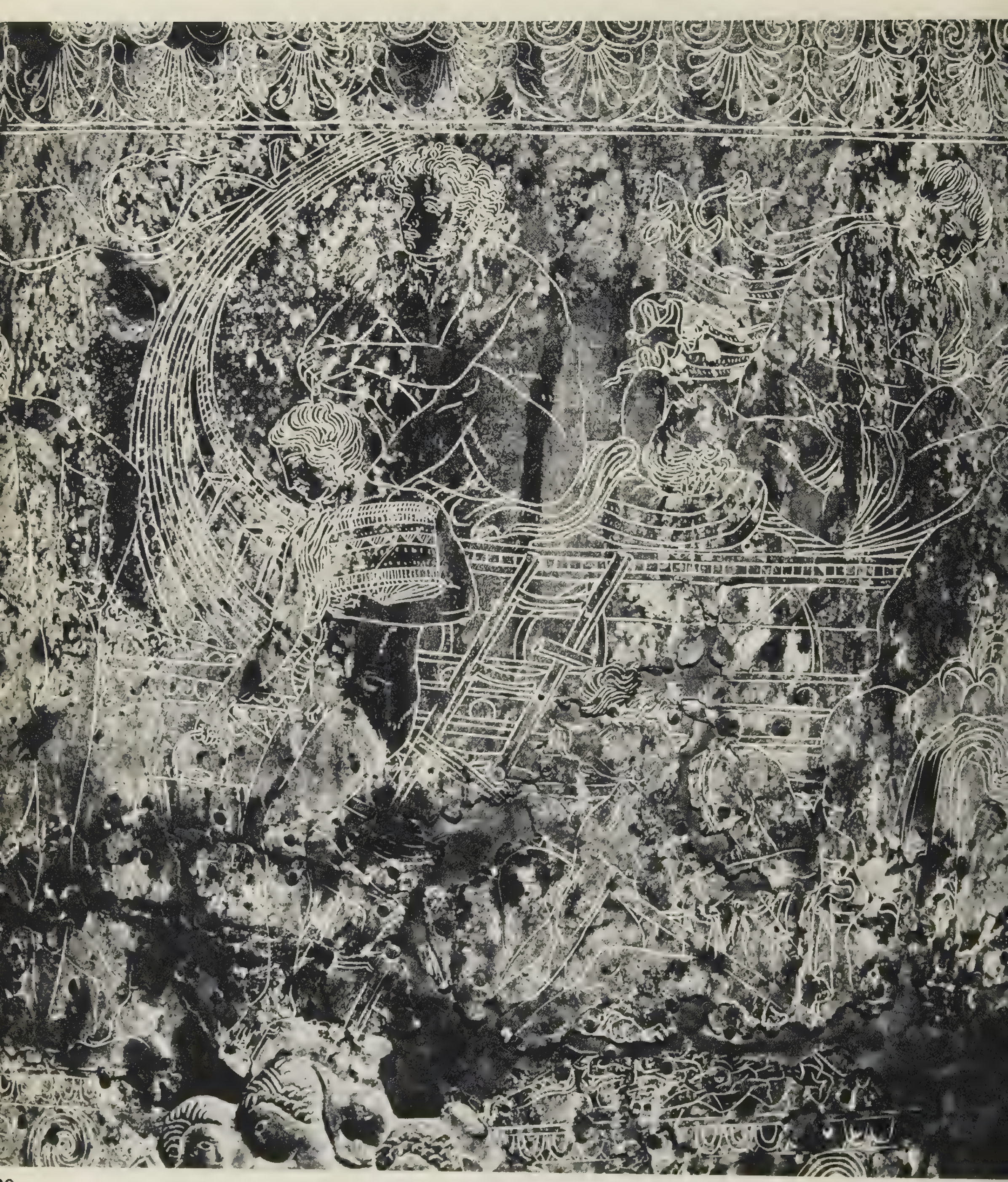


competition against their interests, and discharged him from their employment. So then Eudoxus fitted out an expedition on his own account; he took grain with him, proposing to winter on the route, wait for the monsoon and set off again the summer following. On the success or failure of his circumnavigation of Africa, ancient traditions are divided; some say he was shipwrecked en route, others state that he set off as usual by the Red Sea but came back by the Cape and Gibraltar.

Such then are some of the discoverers of the world and its routes in the Alexandrian era.

I pass now to geographical science. Of this Eratosthenes was one of the most eminent representatives, though his work was not confined to geography alone.

Born in 275 at Cyrene, he was first, like all those of his generation, a disciple of Callimachus: he also went off to study philosophy at Athens, which had remained the city of philosophers. This was the time when, in the Academy, Arcesilaus was turning Platonism into a sort of scepticism known as probabilism. Eratosthenes attended this teaching, and later wrote a History of Philosophy. He also wrote a History of Old Comedy in twelve books.

He was also a poet. At this period when poets prided themselves on their learning, it was only right that the learned should be poets. Eratosthenes restored to poetry one of its oldest functions—he desired that it should be didactic, as the poetry of Hesiod and Solon had been. He versified the science of his time, calling his work *Hermes*: it opened with the legend of how Hermes bit the breast of Hera as she suckled him, and caused the Milky Way to spurt into the skies. After this the poet soared towards the stars: his poem was part astronomical, part geographical, but we have preserved only a fragment from his description of the earth, a passage on the five terrestrial zones, which has been imitated by Virgil.

It will be remembered that André Chenier had begun a *Hermès*, a poem of science and cosmogony which was to have been the great work of his life. A few fragments survive, of great beauty; one such begins:

Salut, ô belle nuit étincelante et sombre,
Consacrée au repos. . . .

André Chenier was a devout student of the Alexandrians—the *Analecta* of the learned Brunck, published in 1776, was his bedside companion—and he may well have taken the idea of his *Hermès* from the *Hermes* of Eratosthenes.

Finally we must not forget to state that Eratosthenes was one of the great librarians of Alexandria. Ptolemy III recalled him from Athens at the age of forty to take charge of the Library, and he held the post for the latter half of his long life, dying in 195, aged eighty. A life full of labours, a head full of science and open to

30. *The ship Argo: detail from a cist (4th Century B.C.). Rome, Villa Guilia Museum*

all the research and all the knowledge of his time—the type of head we see in the Italian scholars of the Quattrocento.

For us he is first and foremost a geographer.

Alexander had already made a beginning when, as befitted a disciple of Aristotle, he had taken savants with him to make, during his campaigns, a whole series of topographical surveys intended to lead to a map of Asia.

About the year 300 a Peripatetic named Dicearchus attempted to make a map of the known world, calculated the height of a number of mountains and tried to measure the circumference of the earth.

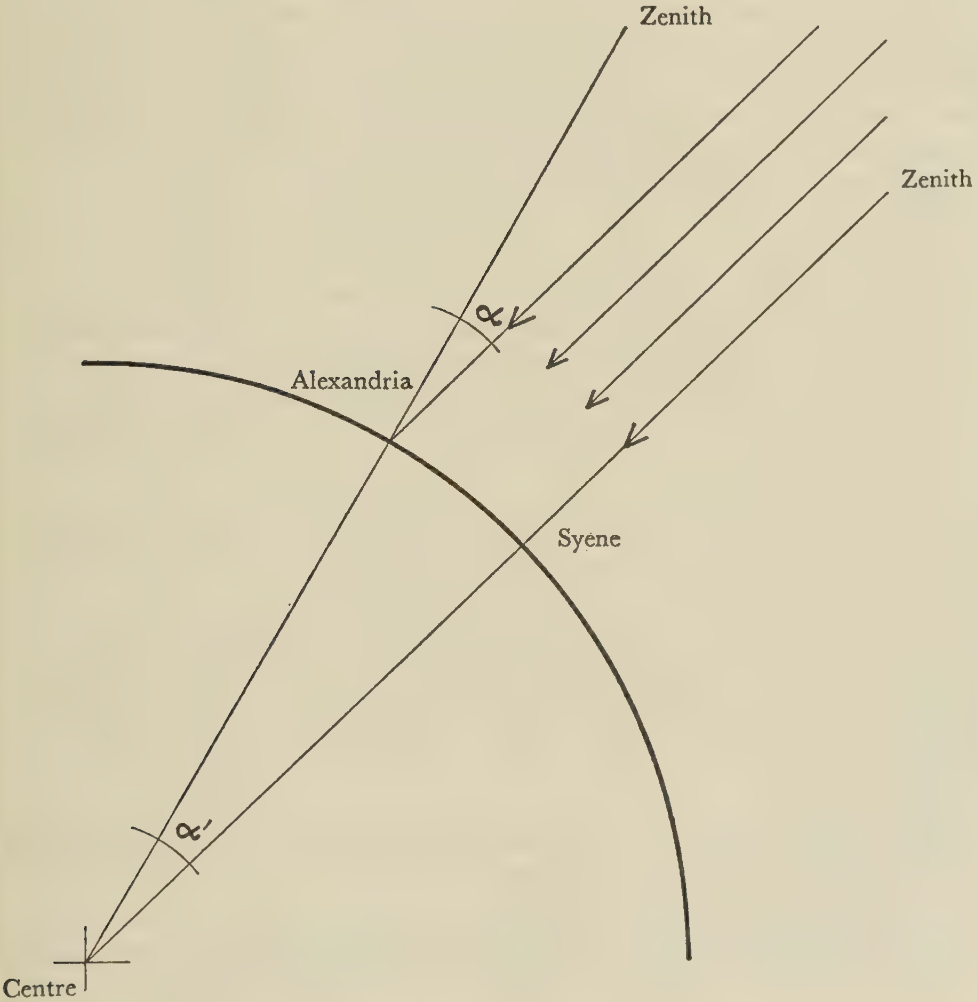
Eratosthenes took up the project of a scientific map of the globe, but with resources and a method far in advance of those of Dicearchus. He made a list of all the 'points' which had had their latitude and longitude scientifically determined; and he launched the idea of scientific expeditions which would make it possible to take bearings on points from a larger number of places in different countries. This idea, which the learned of his time did begin to put into execution, was carried out on a grand scale at the time of the astronomer and geographer Claudius Ptolemaeus (second century A.D.). With a certain number of points already fixed, Eratosthenes drew up his map by drawing lines parallel with the equator, and meridians. On his meridians he placed the points he knew of where it was noon at the same time—that is to say which had the same longitude. On his parallels were the points having the same latitude, that is, where the pole-star makes the same angle with the horizontal. (This angle is, of course, 90° at the Pole and 0° at the equator. Eratosthenes thus obtained rectangles, which however were not of equal width: but the map which he drew up was fairly accurate.

He also had a fairly true sense of the distribution of land and sea over the area of the globe. Aristotle had continued to assume that the extreme East of India joined up with Africa, thus separating the oceans into enclosed seas. Such was Alexander's belief when at one moment he considered returning from India—on dry land—via the sources of the Nile. Eratosthenes knew that the oceans form a single sea and the continents are spread over it like islands, not the oceans enclosed like lakes within the land-mass. He pointed out the analogous behaviour of the tides in the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic, and deduced that it would be possible to sail from Spain to India. It was this that Eudoxus of Cyzicus attempted a little later, and Vasco da Gama finally achieved.

It was Eratosthenes also who divided the terrestrial globe into climatic zones, following Aristotle, but with greater precision. He distinguished five zones—the two glacial zones bounded by the Arctic and Antarctic circles, the two temperate zones between these circles and the tropics, and finally the torrid zone between the two tropics. Inside the torrid zone Eratosthenes noted that there was an inhabited zone astride the equator and two uninhabited zones between this and the two tropics. The observation, or rather hypothesis, is true to fact if we consider the positions of the deserts on the earth's surface.

Finally, he attempted to measure the circumference of the globe and arrived at a figure very close to the truth, by means of a method which was admirable and which is worth mentioning.

He began by assuming that for practical purposes all the sun's rays striking any point on the earth's crust at any one moment are parallel. Now, one fact that he learnt or observed was this—that on the day of the summer solstice, in Syene



(Aswan) in Upper Egypt, near the first cataract, the gnomon of the sundial casts no shadow at noon; or again, one can see the sun from the bottom of a deep well: which means that the sun is in the zenith of Syene. Hence at noon the ray of the sun that passes through Syene theoretically reaches the centre of the earth.

On the other hand, Syene is on roughly the same meridian as Alexandria. So Eratosthenes measured the angle which, at Alexandria the same day, at noon, was formed between the rays of the sun and a line drawn from the zenith of Alexandria to the centre of the earth; there is a theorem which states that if a straight line intersects two parallel straight lines the corresponding angles of intersection are equal, so the angle α mentioned above must be equal to the angle α' which is made by the lines joining the zeniths of Syene and Alexandria respectively to the centre of the earth. Now the angle was the fiftieth part of four right angles, that is to say the fiftieth part of the circumference of the meridian. The distance between Alexandria and Syene is five thousand stades, so if we multiply this by fifty we obtain the length of the meridian, in other words the circumference of the earth.

The calculation gives, in modern terms, a result of forty thousand and fifty kilometres (according to the stade most probably used). Eratosthenes was only fifty kilometres out.

The error is unimportant. It arises from the fact that Syene and Alexandria are not on exactly the same meridian, and that the distance of five thousand stades, measured by caravans, is not altogether accurate. What is important is the method, which is strictly scientific. Later calculations, in particular those of the Arabs, are much less accurate. It was not until the middle of the fourteenth century that anyone did better.

Eratosthenes had set out the results of his geographical research in a book entitled *Geographica*, which is lost. The first book was a history of the science, criticizing geographical conceptions from Homer to his own time: he considered it ridiculous to take the *Odyssey* literally in its descriptions of places, saying that before trying to work out the itinerary of Odysseus one had better find out the leatherworker who sewed up the bag of Aeolus. His disrespect for the sacrosanct authority of Homer shocked the historian Polybius: Eratosthenes gave proof of a critical sense from which certain moderns, notably Victor Bérard, might have benefited.

The other books of the *Geographica* were occupied with scientific, physical or political geography; and we know something of them from Strabo, the best parts in whom seem to come from Eratosthenes.

I may add that Eratosthenes also researched into chronology. He had tried to fix a few certain dates in the ancient history of Greece, before the period known as the era of the Olympians, by consulting Egyptian documents. He it was who fixed the date of the Trojan war at approximately 1180: the most modern researchers have confirmed it.

Lastly, Eratosthenes devised the calendar known as Julian (because Caesar put it into operation in the first century): it is based on a year of three hundred and sixty-five and a quarter days, with leap-years. It was a trifle too long, but it rendered the greatest service after the tremendous disorder of the ancient calendars.

We may see that Eratosthenes had worked in many fields. He earned, from his contemporaries or his students, the surname of *pentathlos*, or, as we should say, 'the all-round athlete'.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MEDICAL SCIENCE. A WORD ON ARCHIMEDES. HERO AND HIS STEAM-ENGINE

The science the Greeks had founded made various further advances during the three great centuries of Alexandria (the third to the first B.C.) before entering the long stagnation of the Roman era and the worse stagnation of the Middle Ages, when an attitude of contemplation inhibited any practical application of knowledge. At this point however it is right to point out that one science at least among the young sciences of Hellas escaped this slow death, which resulted from the Greek refusal to turn science into an instrument of use to man, his progress and his daily well-being. This uniquely fortunate science was medicine.

Founded by Hippocrates as a factual enquiry aimed at safeguarding health and extending as much as might be the ever-menaced life of man, medicine was still blocked in the fifth and fourth centuries by religious and traditional prejudice which prevented it from acquiring exact knowledge of the organs of the human body and their functions. Everywhere in Greece the dissection of dead bodies was strictly prohibited; Aristotle, though he dissected animals in large numbers, could only form an idea of the functioning of our bodily mechanisms by analogies drawn from other mammals, which left much room for over-adventurous hypotheses.

One splendid consequence of the transfer of scientific activity from Greece to Egypt was this, that the carving-up of corpses became legitimate and perfectly natural. In a country where for millenia the dead had been embalmed, and everyone looked on the autopsy of his nearest and dearest as a familiar rite, the rule against dissection was immediately rescinded for the savants of the Museum. A number of records testify that the learned Herophilus made public dissections of human corpses in the course of his medical lectures. This was an important revolution, pregnant with future progress.

Herophilus (born about 300 B.C.) was the earliest teacher of medicine in the Museum, under the first two Ptolemies. He was a savant trained in the strict methods proper to exact science by one of the great disciples of Aristotle and Theophrastus, Strato of Lampsacus, who had been director of the Lyceum, and, at Alexandria, was one of the teachers of Ptolemy Philadelphus. This Strato had a high respect for fact and a keen interest in experiment; he became the friend of Herophilus, and instilled these principles in him. His philosophical views already pointed towards the use of the experimental method in science.

Herophilus, we are told, would teach nothing he had not seen. The knowledge of the organs of our body appears to have put him beside himself with joy. He professed profound contempt for any theory not founded on practice, and familiarity with visible objects; in his lectures at the Museum, which attracted the youth of all Greece and the Orient, he exhibited the human organs one after another, and the discovery of the parts of our bodily mechanism, with the explanation of their workings, was an unparalleled experience which filled the audience with enthusiasm. In this way he publicly dissected over six hundred corpses, according to Tertullian. The new practice led at once to numerous discoveries, elementary but sensational; the results were published in the works of Herophilus, principally his *Anatomica*—all, unfortunately, lost today.

We do know however that he made a distinction at last between veins and arteries, and was the first to recognize that both are full of blood, thus redressing an old error of Greek medicine. He battered lustily against a long-barred door, and it opened all at once on to wide horizons. He examined numerous organs with his own eyes—the liver, the pancreas, the genitals and others, but he gave particular attention to the heart and the circulation. He used the pulse as an indication of the movement of the heart, distinguishing four phases in its beat—systole, diastole, and two intermediate pauses. Holding it to be an essential element in diagnosis, he timed it by means of a clepsydra or water-clock: this must be regarded as a truly notable advance in the quantitative study of biological phenomena.

Besides this, medical science owes Herophilus a series of highly accurate observations concerning the eye, the optic nerve and the retina. Probably his ophthalmic researches were what led him to his important discovery of the nervous system. Our knowledge of this was greatly furthered by him: he recognized the brain as its centre, he established the connexion between the brain and the spinal cord, and he distinguished the sensory nerves from the sinews uniting muscles and bones, very different things though in Greek they bore the same name, which we translate 'nerves'. He did not succeed, however, in distinguishing clearly between sensory and motor nerves.

By the number and importance of his discoveries in anatomy, Herophilus deserves to be considered the founder of this science, as he is also the inventor of a great part of the anatomical terminology still employed today. One of his treatises, written for midwives, did much to improve obstetric procedure. In short, his physiology, like all his medical practice, was founded on a knowledge of anatomy which, though elementary, was soundly based.

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Erasistratus, a contemporary of Herophilus, spent many years at Alexandria where he took part in research on the arterial and venous systems; he was afterwards called to Antioch by the Seleucidae, and died about 240 B.C.

The research of Erasistratus was conducted with a very sure touch, and covers such a vast field that he has often been named the founder of physiology, for which he did as much as Herophilus for anatomy. (Anatomy, be it recalled, is confined to the description of organs; physiology is the science concerned with their functions.)

He realized the great importance of the brain, and noted its convolutions. He was the first to distinguish motor from sensory nerves; he also distinguished veins from arteries, and came to recognize that arteries pulsate and veins do not.

He used the experimental method and carried out his experiments with accuracy. His works have been lost, but at least one experiment of his may be quoted, as recorded on a papyrus discovered in Egypt.

> *If a bird or other similar animal is shut up* [*after weighing*] *in a metal container and left for several days without food, and if then it is weighed together with all the droppings it has excreted as visible matter, the second weight is found to be much less than the first. This comes from the fact that much solid has been turned into vapour; but this can only be realized by reasoning.*

Though well conceived, well executed and leading to a judicious conclusion, this experiment unfortunately had the disadvantage of inspiring Erasistratus with the idea of using reasoning not founded on fact; Herophilus found fault with this in Erasistratus and opposed it as an abuse.

These two great physicians were the founders of two schools which committed medicine to a resolutely scientific path. By the very fact of their competition, and by the proper use of the experimental method, they went on obtaining valuable results in anatomy and physiology; but it is no part of the purpose of this book to enumerate them.

It may however be remarked that it was the Alexandrian physicians who began to develop the practice of anaesthesia, produced by rubbing mandrake-juice on the part to be operated upon. The beneficial result on surgery was great.

The two schools, that of Herophilus and that of Erasistratus, survived brilliantly into the second century A.D. or thereabouts.

In the following ages, it is remarkable that Greek medicine was never entirely forgotten—the art did not die out either in the Roman period or in the Middle Ages, as did most of the other sciences. Its usefulness was too obvious for men to neglect it.

In the Roman era, the doctors were still Greeks. The elder Cato vainly protested against the progress of Greek medicine in Rome, saying that 'The Greeks had sworn to kill the Barbarians with its aid'. No Roman, or almost none, ever learnt or practised medicine; certainly none gained distinction in the science: it remained Greek.

And even in the darkest centuries, haunted by the deadliest epidemics, medicine, rejuvenated by the Arabs, remained faithful to its Greek origins and remained a science, giving ground neither to the art of self-proclaimed healers nor to the glamour of magic practices: it remained a science, modest, but compounded of observation and reason. There is scarcely a century in the Middle Ages which, in compensation for the misdeeds of superstition, cannot boast the name of some great physician or claim some discovery. It was a palpable conquest won by men, and put at the service of men.

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Alexandria also nurtured engineers, another fact I wish to emphasize.

The Greek people had always cherished a sneaking liking for mechanical devices. One of the earliest children of its imagination, Odysseus, was called, so the poet tells us, 'a great man for machines' (*polumêchanos*). In a very early chapter of this work we pointed out that Odysseus was not only a very good sailor, but a good workman in every trade—*homo faber* at his best.

If other tendencies, over the time of its historical evolution, had become uppermost in the Greek people, and if by this time science—born of the craftsman's needs, but tied to and dominated by philosophical thought for only too long—had more and more become pure speculation instead of aiming at applications in practical spheres, the cause lay in technical and social reasons which I shall enter into at length on a later page. The fact remains that Greek science at the beginning of the Alexandrian age was above all else theory, abstraction, calculation. Setting aside medicine and biology which are exceptional cases, it was contributing to civilization any number of new facts in arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, cartography, and so on—knowledge always based on the strictest logic, tied closely into a coherent whole—and this whole formed a construction so harmonious, so irresistible, so happily adapted to supply a deep-laid need of the human mind, that man would have renounced life itself rather than forego it.

But then had come the decline of Athens after Alexander, and the transfer to the new Hellenic capital of all scientific activity—which from that moment on, be it noted, was divorced from philosophical activity, for that had remained fixed in Athens. This displacement had had the effect of bringing logical strictness of reasoning, so characteristic of the Greeks, into contact with the empirical methods of an architectural tradition, to take one example, in which everything was rule of thumb, but the rules had been tested by three thousand years' experience; or with the high prestige of a system of surveying which proved its worth year in, year out, after the Nile floods; or with an enormously wide range of assorted inventions, from the shadoof or well-sweep to the mechanical thresher.

By this combination with the venerable empirical approach of Egypt (or of the East), Greek rationalism had its last chance to touch ground before a new leap. The fusing of piecemeal inventions into a well-knit logical synthesis was what brought to life in the Greek savants their ancestral love for mechanical devices.

Then, too, a new Odysseus was born in 287 B.C.—Archimedes.

The theoretical achievements of this great scientist were dazzling; of them I shall say very little, preferring to confine myself to his love for machines. Let it suffice to say, in the style of the *Encyclopédie Larousse*, that we can see in his works an astonishing anticipation of the integral calculus, a method which was not discovered again for almost another two thousand years. Archimedes' method in mathematics, taken together with the work of the Pythagoreans and of Euclid who perfected it, and also with other discoveries of his own contemporaries, brought man to the knowledge of the material space surrounding him and of the theoretical forms of the objects found therein—that is to say, the ideal, geometrical forms to which they approximate more or less, and of which we have to know the laws in order to act on the material world.

But Archimedes also knew that these objects not only have forms and dimensions: they move, or may move, or else remain motionless as a result of whatever forces may be acting on them. The great Syracusan studied those forces, and invented a new branch of mathematics, in which material bodies were reduced to their geometrical forms but nevertheless retained their weight. This geometry of weight gave rise to rational mechanics—statics and hydrostatics, the first principle of which was invented by Archimedes and bears his name. The story goes that he was in his bath, and raising his leg, was surprised to notice that it was lighter than usual; so he rushed out naked, crying *eureka* ('I have found it!') in his enthusiasm. It is a pleasant story, but incorrect in the form usually told: the famous *eureka* was not uttered, as is too often said, at the discovery of 'Archimedes' principle', but at that of the specific weights of metals, which was also his, and which Vitruvius relates in detail.

But Archimedes was not only a great scientist, he was at the same time a great lover of machines. He listed and reduced to theory the five machines known as 'simple' which were known in his day: these are the lever ('Give me a fulcrum and I will lift the earth', was one of his sayings), the wedge, the pulley, the endless screw and the winch. He is even credited frequently with the invention of the endless screw; or it may be that he made improvements in the water-screw which the Egyptians used to drain their marshes. This led him to another invention which was of the first importance, common as it has become since—that of the bolt, a screw with a nut added to it.

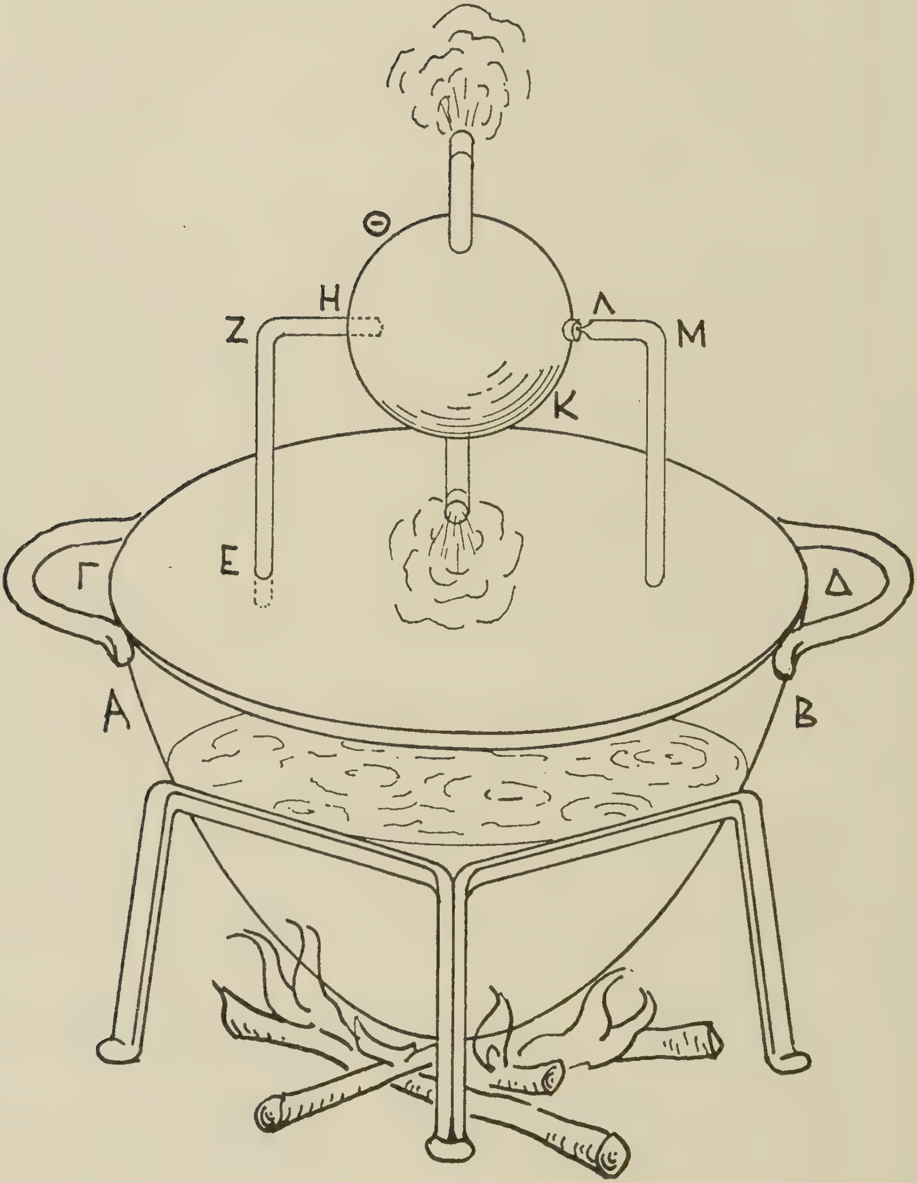
If any of his fellow citizens thought such inventions pointless, Archimedes refuted them soundly the day when, with an ingenious arrangement of lever, winch and screw, he astonished the bystanders by launching a heavy galley drawn up on the hard and loaded with its crew and cargo. An even more convincing proof was offered in the year 212 B.C., when Syracuse was besieged by the Romans, and the most famous of its sons invented a whole series of machines of war which kept the enemy in check for nearly three years. This exploit, which is told by Plutarch, Polybius and Livy, undoubtedly evoked more response from simple minds than the calculation of the value of π, so useful to young mathematicians since, which was also due to him.

He died in the siege of Syracuse, killed by a Roman soldier while he was absorbed in the solution of some problem he had set himself. But he left behind him numerous disciples. On the new trail he had blazed a whole generation of devoted admirers pressed forward, burning to prove their knowledge like their master by concrete results.

The earliest of these disciples was the Alexandrian Ctesibius, who lived in the second century before Christ. The mechanical inventions of Archimedes were in their heyday: to them had been added that of the toothed wheel. Ctesibius rolled over the ground a wheel which was geared with a series of toothed pinions, and created the revolution counter, the ancestor of the modern motorist's speedometer. From this he turned to an improvement of the clepsydra, which he fitted with cogs and rendered able to ring a bell or move tiny figures. Then he went on to invent a hydraulic organ, and a whole series of instruments for drawing wine from casks, water from cellars or pus from wounds.

One of Ctesibius' pupils made a name in the technique of pumping, and was in turn the master of a savant who appears to many today as the greatest after Archimedes among engineers of the time—Hero of Alexandria.

We have reason to think that Hero lived between 150 and 100 B.C. A considerable part of his work has been preserved. If we study it carefully, more than one Renaissance thinker who was once considered an original mind appears no more today than a copyist of Hero—even Leonardo da Vinci, say some, though this may be going too far.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Hero, besides his purely theoretical work, was the head of the engineering school he had founded in Alexandria. This was an entirely new departure, for although in earlier centuries builders had arisen in Mesopotamia and Egypt who command respect even today by their material achievements, the men of those distant times were far from being capable of imparting to pupils and preserving for posterity a body of theoretical knowledge such as was indispensable for any further development of science. The school directed by Hero, on the other hand, may without any absurdity be compared to our institutes of technology. As there, his abstract general courses in arithmetic, geometry, physics, or astronomy were accompanied by practical courses in woodwork, metalwork, machine construction and architecture.[1] These are the courses of instruction by Hero which have survived.

The great teachers of the school were not specialists. Hero himself, in the words of a modern historian, 'excelled in every subject in the curriculum'. No further proof is needed than his invention of the dioptra (a primitive theodolite), a surveyor's instrument formed by a water-level mounted on a micrometer drum and compensating for errors by double readings. Nor should we forget his inventions in hydrostatics, including the famous 'Hero's fountain', the toy which Jean-Jacques Rousseau carried round as a boy from village to village to earn money, eighteen centuries later.

But Hero was responsible for one invention which was far more extraordinary, to which he was led by his discovery of the properties of steam under pressure. This was the aeolipila, which was nothing less than a steam turbine, a genuine precursor of Denis Papin's *marmite* eighteen centuries before the birth of Papin, and twenty centuries before Parsons.

Let us translate with care the Greek text in which this machine is described, in Hero's *Pneumatica*. It reads:

> *Above a cauldron of hot water a ball moves on a pivot.* [*These words form the title.*]
>
> *Let AB be a cauldron containing water, placed over a fire. It is covered by a lid ΓΔ, which is pierced by a bent tube EZH, the end of which* [*at H*] *enters the hollow ball ΘK. Diametrically opposite* [*to H, at Λ*] *is fixed the pivot M, resting on the lid ΓΔ.*
>
> *To the ball are added two small bent tubes, diametrically opposite to one another. The bends must be right-angled, and the tubes perpendicular to the line HΛ.*

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[1] See under P. Rousseau in Bibliography. Here and above my account follows this work closely (Author's note).

> *When the cauldron is heated, the steam will enter the ball through the tube EZH and, as it emerges into the atmosphere by the bent tubes, will cause the ball to spin. . . .*

The text leaves no possible doubt. The great disciple of Archimedes, when he constructed the aeolipila, was the inventor of the steam-engine.

At once a question enters the mind. What did he do with it? What did the ancients do with it?

The answer is nothing; or almost nothing.

Coming into possession of a source of energy which today enables us to cross oceans in liners like the *Normandie* and *Queen Mary*, the ancients simply went on using the muscles of oarsmen when they wanted to go from Athens to Marseilles or Alexandria and back.

But why? We must try to disentangle a very complicated set of reasons for this long oblivion in which one of the most important discoveries of civilization was allowed to stagnate—reasons at once technical, psychological and most of all social.

Could not the ancients have used the discovery to lighten the toil of oarsmen, or more generally of all workers? Yes, they could, but it never occurred to them: they did not do it. That is the stark fact to be explained.

Let us note first of all that in the history of science there is always an immense time-lag between a discovery of new knowledge and its use in practice. In modern times, years passed after the light-giving energy in the electric current had been discovered, before anyone produced a vacuum bulb fitted with a filament to illuminate our labours. Years always pass (but not always seventeen centuries!). The human mind is slow to work out its discoveries in the absence of some urgent need—often a need of war.

Other causes come into play: prejudices, *a priori* theories—some of which, in the course of this book, we have already come across. One was the idealist prejudice concerning the 'dignity of geometry'.

The Hellenistic world, so enthusiastic over technical inventions, was also passionately fond of mechanical toys. Hero himself had barely published his book on *Pneumatics*, in which is found the description of the steam-engine, when he brought out another on the *Manufacture of Automata*. He was deeply interested in these playthings; he used the steam-engine to make puppets dance in a ring, or to make temple doors open by themselves, or to exhibit to the gaping crowd figures of blacksmiths at work or Hercules in battle or other subjects which 'worked by themselves'. 'Geometry at play' as Plutarch put it—he saw no harm in it at all. The invention of automata had begun before Hero: thus Archytas had made wooden figures of doves which flew. But these predecessors had been rebuked in the strongest terms by Plato, who remarked indignantly that they were corrupting the dignity of geometry and turning it from the immaterial objects of pure intelligence back to the sensible, using base materials and manual labour for unworthy ends.[1]

The prejudice to which Plato thus gave voice, against manual labour as being only fit for slaves, discredited, degraded, hindered and finally strangled the growth of invention in applied mechanics. It was, as we may infer from the quotation, a prejudice connected with the existence of slavery.

There was yet another way in which slavery was holding back the use of machines. Labour cost nothing, the reserves of slavery were bottomless, there was no end to the muscle-power of those thousands of creatures who built the pyramids and raised the obelisks with the aid of a few pulleys, inclined planes and perhaps some other types of 'simple machines' which our age has not so far rediscovered or imagined. Why should anyone spend all the money necessary to construct complicated machines of dubious usefulness, or usable only for amusement? But, somebody may have protested, machines get through more work than slaves.—Nonsense; one has to be realistic about this—the slaves are there, we have only to use their work. Why increase production for markets which do not exist? Nobody, in that age, was in a position to answer such arguments, which were as irrefutable as common sense itself. Nobody could even conceive the arguments, for the existence of slavery lapped round the ancient world, an impassable barrier to thought.

Finally we must not forget that before steam-engines could be used to full effect, they had to be manufactured in large dimensions. All that Hero had made for his own use was small-scale models, and the state of the iron industry allowed of nothing more. As we know, we owe this industry, or at least its spread through the West, to the Hittite people, about the year 1300 B.C. From that time iron began to be used for the manufacture of arms. The Dorians, who overran Greece and the Peloponnese about 1000 B.C., had long tapering swords of iron, whereas the Acheans had nothing to defend themselves with but short daggers and heavy swords of bronze.

So iron came into what may be called common use in the beginning of the first millenium B.C.—and that use, as with many other inventions, was war. But, granted that we may speak of 'common use' at so early a date, it remained true that this metal was harder to come by than copper and bronze. A temperature of 1,083 degrees will melt copper and extract it from the ore; the tin which is mixed with it to form bronze melts earlier, at 232 degrees. But iron will not melt below 1,535 degrees;[2] moreover as it is always present in ore in the form of an oxide, great

[1] Cf. p. 106.

[2] 1083° C. = 1981·4° F.; 232° C. = 449·6° F.; 1535° C. = 2795° F.

quantities of charcoal are needed to free it of its oxygen—and great blacksmiths' bellows, and blast-furnace ovens. The Alexandrians had none of all this.

We see that Hero would have met with many obstacles if he had attempted to complete his invention and construct a usable steam-engine. But the main obstacle was the fact that men in his day had no reason for wanting to replace slave-labour by machinery.

In the final analysis this story of the steam-engine without a use is most instructive. Its moral is that civilizations can only pass over certain thresholds of development if they are borne forward by the will of the gradually ascending masses. The coming into use in modern times of the steam-engine created by Denis Papin (after so many frustrations) and by Watt was contemporary with the rise of the bourgeois in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. What comparable rise was there that could have brought Hero's engine to fruition at the time of its first conception?

But at the same time we may remark that it is almost unimaginable for any great discovery to disappear for ever from human history. In the strange flowering of knowledge—and peril—in which human beings find themselves today, there are times when they seem to be nothing but the helpless puppets of innumerable chances. But this is an illusion. In reality, at every stage of this fantastic adventure, this Tale of a thousand or a hundred thousand thousand and one nights called History, there stands a figure ever present, ever more sure of eye, more clear of purpose, more active in endeavour from century to century, standing ready to snatch up the chance that has fallen to earth and revive the seed that has died, so that they may grow and bring forth leaves and fruit in the future which even now is marching to meet us (as the Greeks said), and moment by moment is turning into our present. That figure is the Genius of man.

Nothing is ever lost of the hopes of humanity.

31. *Olive tree, with Agrigento in the background*

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

BACK TO POETRY: CALLIMACHUS, APOLLONIUS

Perhaps after the brilliance of scientific research and discovery Alexandrian poetry may appear pallid. The best we can say of it is that, in its main stream, it does try to avoid repeating the poetry before it—to avoid being 'academic'.

The schoolmaster of the new Parnassus in Alexandria was Callimachus. The name of this man, the Boileau of the new age of poetry, dominates all the work produced in the city under Ptolemy Philadelphus. In contemporaries it aroused admiration, submission, inspiration and sometimes revolt.

The *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes is just this—the act of revolt of a young poet against the poetical prescriptions and prohibitions of the Museum professor who was the leader of the Alexandrian school.

Who was this Callimachus? His life follows the characteristic curve of the scholar-poet; what we know as a man of letters. It had three phases. The first was the struggle to make a name, the penurious existence of the unknown dominie, a provincial from Cyrene who opened his own primary school in an Alexandrian backstreet; who thought himself and, more important, willed himself to be a poet, and, in such time as he could wrest from his lessons, launched his earliest poems—manifestoes, the first of the epigrams, and petitions addressed to the all-powerful prince. A poor devil who allowed himself a little Bohemianism, a few casual or dubious love-affairs—or at least claimed them in his verses.

Phase two—success, after a piece of flattery addressed to the king had found its mark at last: the chair of oratory or poetry in the Museum, public favour, the favour of the authorities, official duties at the Library, commissions from the court, and pensions from the King. At the same time the Master proclaims the new poetic doctrine, and publishes the poems which are to illustrate it.

Last, the third phase—jealous rivals gunning for the poet of established name and authority, literary bickerings with a hostile and scornful younger generation.

32. *Near Agrigento: a shepherd with his sheep*

A war of epigrams and satirical pamphlets over the quickly dated theories of the revered leader.

All this is guesswork rather than certain knowledge. The greater part of his work has perished; but what we do know is, that it did little else but give poetical 'models' based on his theories. The theories were valid: the unfortunate thing was that, to provide examples of the new poetry which he could adumbrate with accuracy, a poet was needed, and Callimachus was not a poet.

But he was an intelligent man. The last thing he wished his contemporaries to do was to copy the great poets of the past who had become classics; he was poles removed from academicism. In fact he condemned that imitation of the classics which was already, on all sides, a dead weight on artistic creation. He knew that the old poetic genres were finished, that no one would re-write Homer or the tragedians; and he denounced the dreary cyclic poems in which the epic was vainly seeking to outlive its own demise.

Here are two of his epigrams:

I hate the cyclic poem, nor do I take pleasure in the road which carries many to and fro. . . . I drink not from every well, I loathe all common things.

Great is the stream of the Assyrian river, but much filth of earth and much refuse it carries on its waters. And not of every water do the Melissae carry to Deo, but of the trickling stream that springs from a holy fountain, pure and undefiled, the very crown of waters.[1]

So, instead of the mighty river of epic, so often turbid, let the poem be a spring of pure water—a mere runnel, but precious in every drop.

Callimachus calls for works that are short and finely chiselled. 'A great book' he said, 'is a great evil.' He upheld the value of craftsmanship, he preached technical perfection. By his insistence on finish he rendered service to the artist; he made possible the supreme accomplishment of Theocritus. He wanted the poet to be not, let us say, Victor Hugo with his sublimity and his occasional carelessness, but José-Maria de Heredia with his meticulous workmanship. True, work cannot replace inspiration—as Callimachus knew—but in an age of dried-up inspiration and facile writing, an age when anyone could aspire to give birth to a five-act tragedy (as we might put it) or let himself be carried away on the slippery slope of the dactylic hexameter (Homer's metre, our tragic Alexandrine)[2] to write an epic poem in twenty-four books on some mythological theme, it was the salvation of poetry to invite it to go back to being a difficult art. It saved it from academicism, which meant death.

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[1] Translated by A. W. Mair, Loeb Classical Library, 1921, pp. 157, 59.

[2] There is no real similarity between the Homeric hexameter and the French alexandrine, which may be dactylic but, when it is, is not a hexameter (Translator).

At the same time we should not imagine that, in restoring the primacy of art, Callimachus was formulating a theory of 'l'art pour l'art' or 'poésie pure'. Subjects, to him, were of the highest importance. Let us see what subjects he used.

He asked, simply and sensibly, that the subjects of poetry should bear some relation to the new interests of a new world. If he rejected epic and drama, it was not only for the reasons of form I have given, but because of his feeling that the heroism on which they were based had become a matter of convention and did not interest his own age. The battles in the *Iliad*, the struggle of the tragic hero against fate, or even the fatality of passion in Euripides—in a word the conflict of man with his condition, which had been the essential subject of earlier poetic literature; that collective bitterness and protest which made the poet take sides against fate and culminated in the intimate, paradoxical joy of his stricken hero dying for the community and for glory—such things stimulated the vital energies in man, but perhaps at the moment could not be carried any further; and such things had ceased to bulk very largely in the minds of the Alexandrians, or of the majority of them. Heroism was no longer a thing that concerned them personally: the gods had ceased to mean for them a principle of action and a mysterious compulsion challenging to battle so that the best among men, accepting the challenge, might rise above themselves. The gods were coming to be no more than a refuge, a consolation, in which a man could forget himself and his wretchedness. This had not been clearly worked out, it may be, by men of the time; simply, they brushed the rest aside. For men were now following their individual interests, and as individuals were no longer devoting themselves to the greatness of a city, or the service of the gods, or—except rarely—a great passion. No vision of greatness which they could accept seemed capable henceforth of sending them to find themselves in conflict. They were petty bourgeois, demi-intellectuals, settled in their comforts and their culture. Heroism?—a sonorous convention, operated by gods of an *ancien régime*. Callimachus writes airily, 'To thunder belongs not to me, but to Zeus.'[1] And he calls for a literature which shall belong to him. It shall be worthy of his ambitions and hoped-for career, but more modest and sincere than in the hands of such as were still content to strike the heroic note.

He seems to have grasped that each period needs to rediscover poetry in the essential interests of its own time. To restore contact between poetry and life, to rehabilitate poetry as a living art, and, what is more, a difficult art, such seem to have been the honourable intentions of Callimachus.

What we are obliged, unfortunately, to add, is that the interests of the age, as it happened, made a rather poor and unpromising subject for poetry. Thus, men of the time were concerned with science, and still more with science in its crude form as mere erudition. This was their passion, if the word is not too strong. It was so with Callimachus, who had for erudition a passionate and a voluptuous devotion; it was his form of lyricism, of poetry. Under his leadership therefore the Alexandrians endeavoured to make poetry out of erudition, or out of astronomy. They were right to try that rather than write poetry that would be stillborn. If *Antigone* left them cold in comparison with the discovery of a new star, they had better make poetry out of the physical world instead of the world within. But it goes without saying that in forsaking man, and the enigma of his destiny, poetry was taking fearful risks.

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 351.

The *Phenomena* of Aratus may then be the work which fulfilled the requirements of Callimachus most accurately. It was an astronomical poem which described the constellations in the rather arid syle of a scientific treatise, with quantities of mythological erudition thrown in. It enjoyed immense popularity for centuries; Cicero translated it into Latin verse, Virgil and Ovid regarded it as a model, the Renaissance took it for one of the major works of antiquity, and Rémi Belleau, in translating it, restored to it a certain vigour. As for us moderns, the world science reveals to us is greater far than the astronomical manual of Aratus, and his petty mosaic of myths has less warmth in it than interstellar space.

I have tried to lay down the main lines of Callimachus' poetics. They lacked greatness, but were not false, in the sense that they sized up the forces of the period fairly well. One or two good poets, in their attempts to 'modernize' poetry as he had desired, discovered new fields—bucolic poetry (I refer to Theocritus), or realistic poetry in the most vulgar sense (I refer to Herodas). Both followed Callimachus, not only in rejecting a now conventional heroism, but also in endeavouring to give their work a high artistic polish—Theocritus more particularly, but also Herodas in his own way.

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But it must be remarked too that, though those great disciples restored the value of poetry by following a path which Callimachus had at least inspired, if not exactly charted, another poet was found, a mere boy of twenty, to fly in the face of the old Master's counsels and write a vast epic on the heroic exploits of the Argonauts, and the loves of Jason and Medea. This student, fired with love for Homer and belief that he could continue and rival his work, one fine day called together his companions, his teachers, and the intelligentsia of court and city, to hear him read his *Argonautica*. His name was Apollonius, and he was later surnamed 'of Rhodes' because it was to that island that he exiled himself, or was exiled, after the storm roused by the reading. (The ancients relate that the sentence of banishment was pronounced by one of the Ptolemies—we do not know which—at the request of Callimachus. We do not know if it was so: this kind of gossip is easily invented.)

If it was publicity that Apollonius wanted when he set up the *Argonautica* like a banner of revolt against Callimachus, he got it. On the other hand nothing prevents us from believing that he simply and sincerely obeyed what he took to be the voice of his own genius. Be that as it may, war broke out in the 'bird-cage of the Muses' between the supporters of the 'grand old' epic tradition and those of quintessential poetry in which every word was weighed and precious. Apollonius spent his life amending and improving his manuscript; he crammed it with an ill-digested learning which he had not possessed when he gave his public reading—for it is not the learning of a student of twenty. He imagined he was thus improving the poem and showing that he too, had he wished. . . . But he improved nothing.

Then he brought out his most cutting pen for a war of epigrams against Callimachus, in which the tone sometimes sinks to scurrility.

Callimachus the outcast, the butt, the wooden head! The origin is Callimachus who wrote the Origins.[1]

(The *Origins* was the title of a collection of poems by him.)

Here are a few more. The theme is always the same—for Apollonius (or his friends), there is the breed of poets, and there are schoolmasters and pedants, and the two camps cannot agree.

Grammarian breed, vermin attacking the Muses of others, silly grubs polluting great works, curs yelping in defence of Callimachus: ye plagues of poets, fuddlers of children's brains, bugs that batten on poetry—to hell with you!

Grammarians, ye book-worms feeding on thorns [i.e. thorny passages], . . . dogs of Zenodotus, soldiers of Callimachus . . . , hunters of melancholy conjunctions who take delight in min *and* sphin *and in enquiring if the Cyclops had dogs. . . .*[2]

Callimachus did not fail to reply. Each camp in this quarrel over the epic claimed to be upholding true poetry, and Callimachus was supported by the best poet of the day, Theocritus, who writes in one of his *Idylls:*

If I hate an architect who labours to raise a building higher than the peak of

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[1] *Greek Anthology* XI 275, translated by W. R. Paton, Loeb Classical Library, Vol. V, 1918, p. 199.

[2] *Ibid.* XI 321, trans. cited, Vol. V, p. 219.—*Min* and *sphin* are Homeric pronominal forms, which schoolboys had to be taught. 'Had the Cyclops dogs?' appears to have been the title of some learned work, in the vein satirized by Mr Leavis ('How many children had Lady Macbeth?'). Author's note (adapted).

Oromedon, I hate no less those hens of the Muses that cackle in vain to vie with the bard of Chios [*Homer*].

But it is time to leave these literary brawls. I shall give a summary of Apollonius' pseudo-Homeric epic, the *Argonautica*, choosing the better portions, and try to show what value it has.

Here is the story. The first book opens with an invocation to Apollo which also recalls the original causes of the action, though the treatment is obscure and inadequate—how King Pelias ordered Jason to go to Colchis and bring him back the Golden Fleece. Then the poet resorts to a formula found in the *Iliad*, and draws up a catalogue of heroes on the model of Homer's catalogue of ships. In it he introduces fifty-four characters, each with his own little biographical article, to which is added some information about the chief products of his country. This geography text-book is of unmitigated tedium; nor has it any point whatever, since most of the personages mentioned play no part in the story afterwards.

Next come scenes of farewells and sacrifices, and other uninspiring imitations of ancient epic. The ship sails, hugging the coast, for far-off Colchis in the Black Sea, and its voyage gives rise to any number of commentaries, historical, geographical, or etymological. Apollonius unloads on us an enormous store of erudition. The work becomes less like an epic poem than a guide-book for the educated tourist; the poet's aim here seems to be to insert all the place-names he can, together with all the interesting details connected with them. These 'notes' are linked to the story in the most awkward fashion: 'Hence it comes about that even today this or that usage has survived,' or 'this place bears this name', and so on. Such disparities of tone continually help to break the illusion of the epic narrative. Apollonius would seem to be only another Alexandrian like the rest.

The first episode of importance is the halt at Lemnos. We learn first that the women of the island, after a fit of collective jealousy, have massacred their husbands, and with them the whole male population, children and all. For a year, instead of living submissive to the law of Athena and Cypris, they have been tilling the fields and on occasion bearing arms. The coming of the Argonauts fills them with alarm—how could they repel such heroes as these, if they should attack? Hypsipyle their queen summons a meeting of women, and suggests sending the men food and fair words to induce them to set sail again; but Polyxo, her old nurse, thinks of a better plan—why not bring the Argonauts in and seize an unlooked-for chance to repopulate the city? So Hypsipyle dispatches a personal invitation to Jason.

Thereupon Jason wraps himself in his cloak—a cloak on which it so happens that Athena has embroidered a multitude of mythological scenes: in fact the cloak corresponds exactly to the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*. So, a detailed description. . . .

Jason goes to the queen's palace. This Hypsipyle is a wily woman; she thinks up a credible falsehood to explain to the Greeks why there are no men in Lemnos. She also knows how to blush and lower her eyes. With suitably chosen words she offers Jason her throne and her person. The hero allows himself to be beguiled; so do his companions, by other women. Only Heracles stays with the ships and rages. But for him and his loud reproaches they would have forgotten their quest in the soft delights of Lemnos. It is easy to see that what we have here is a crib from the *Odyssey*: Hypsipyle is copied from Circe and Calypso—in all but stature. For that matter, the adventure takes place in a more 'distinguished' level of society, and the scene of separation is all that is fitting, as it should be between people with social poise. In a word the tone is nearer Georges Ohnet[1] than Homer.

The next adventure is borrowed from the fairy-tale streak in the *Odyssey*, and fairly accurately repeats that of Odysseus in the country of the Laestrygonians. These were giants who used to throw boulders from the cliff-tops into a port to destroy any ships unwary enough to enter it. They killed all the Greeks except Odysseus, who had stayed outside. In the *Argonautica* the giants are the sons of the Earth; they have six arms each, and they hurl enormous rocks from the cliff on to the harbour beneath, to block the entrance and trap the Greeks. But fortunately Heracles (the plagiarism is patent)—Heracles bends his bow and slays all the giants; not one escapes, and none of the Greeks is harmed. Apollonius imagines that he will magnify the stature of his heroes by making them triumph on every occasion, and without mishap, but the result is the opposite; the reader cannot take these giants seriously when they let themselves be slaughtered like so many sheep.

The adventure ends with a fine simile. The detail is often good in Apollonius, and better in descriptive than in narrative vein—a bad sign in an epic poet. However, better this than nothing.

> *When the long timbers for a ship have been hewn by the woodman's axe they are laid in rows on a beach and there they lie and soak till they are ready to receive the bolts. That is how these fallen monsters looked, stretched out in a row on the grey beach by the harbour mouth. Some were sprawling in a mass with their limbs on shore and their heads and breasts in the sea. Some lay the other way about; their heads were resting on the sands and their feet were deep in the water. But in either case they were carrion for birds and fish.*[2]

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[1] A novelist and playwright of the early years of the present century, very popular for a time among readers who could not stomach Naturalist literature (Translator).

[2] *The Voyage of Argo*, translated by E. V. Rieu, Penguin Classics, 1959, p.63.

But now comes the best episode in the first book, of which it forms the close. What has happened is that Apollonius has ceased here to imitate the ancients, and entrusts himself to the purest inspiration of Alexandrian poetry; so he writes a short poem instinct with love for things and creatures, a poem in which the delights of the world of sense mingle with the nostalgia of the heart which dreamed them and yearns to be with its dream.

It is the episode of Heracles and Hylas, one which Theocritus also has related. The two youths were close friends and Heracles' strength shielded the fresh beauty of Hylas with a brother's care. Then, one rough day at sea, Heracles broke his oar; so at evening after landfall, while the others lit the camp fire, he plunged inland into the forest to make himself another.

Meanwhile Hylas had gone off by himself with a bronze ewer in search of some hallowed spring where he could draw water. . . .

Hylas soon found a spring, which the people of the neighbourhood call Pegae. He reached it when the nymphs were about to hold their dances—it was the custom of all those who haunt that beautiful headland to sing the praise of Artemis by night. The nymphs of the mountain peaks and caverns were all posted some way off to patrol the woods; but one, the naiad of the spring, was just emerging from the limpid water as Hylas drew near. And there, with the full moon shining on him from a clear sky, she saw him in all his radiant beauty and alluring grace. Her heart was flooded by desire; she had a struggle to regain her scattered wits. But Hylas now leant over to one side to dip his ewer in; and as soon as the water was gurgling loudly round the ringing bronze she threw her left arm round his neck in her eagerness to kiss his gentle lips. Then with her right hand she drew his elbow down and plunged him in midstream.[1]

This is agreeable Alexandrian poetry; not as melodious as Theocritus, it is true, in the original Greek, but with a feeling for the charm of woodlands, the beauty of springs, and the appeal of youthful limbs. André Chénier used these lines of Apollonius, as well as an idyll of Theocritus, in writing his own graceful *Hylas*.

The end of Apollonius' poem tells of the grief of Heracles, and how he roamed the whole night in the wood, calling for his friend. At daybreak the ship set sail without him, and his companions discovered his absence only when it was too late.

Book II adds nothing new to the work; episodes in the voyage follow one another with nothing to bind them together. Apollonius imagined he could construct an epic out of a collection of adventures joined end to end; such, he thought, was the *Odyssey*. But in Homer's poem, the hero imparted to the procession of adventures the unity of his own powerful presence. Each adventure of Odysseus showed Odysseus in a new light, as he emerged each time greater from

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 68–9.

the ordeal imposed by Poseidon or Calypso or Penelope or fate—greater in courage, greater in the ingenuity which answered every stroke of destiny by some suitable device or deep-laid scheme. Each time Odysseus *responded* to destiny, vindicated his manhood.

But not so Jason. Any unforeseen misfortune puts him out; more than once Apollonius repeats the same form of words to describe him—as soon as trouble presents itself, Jason is 'struck powerless'. So his only characteristic is his lack of character; all told, he is a complete nullity from start to finish, or almost. The entire epic is wrecked by this 'powerlessness' of its hero, which might just as truly be called the powerlessness of the poet to create character.

Towards the end of book II, the *Argonautica* has no unity left to distinguish it from the disconnected jottings of an itinerary. Here is a sample.

At nightfall on the following day they reached the land of the Chalybes. These people do not use the ploughing ox. They not only grow no corn, but plant no vines or trees for their delicious fruit and graze no flocks in dewy pastures. Their task is to dig for iron in the stubborn ground and they live by selling the metal they produce. . . .

Soon after leaving them behind, the Argonauts . . . sailed in safety past the country of the Tibareni. Here, when a woman is in childbirth, it is the husband who takes to his bed. He lies there groaning with his head wrapped up and his wife feeds him with loving care. She even prepares the bath for the event.

(This topsy-turvy world is an imitation of Herodotus, worked in with the imitation Homer.)

Next they passed the . . . highlands where the Mossynoeci live in the mossynes *or wooden houses from which they take their name. These people have their own ideas of what is right and proper. What we as a rule do openly in town or market-place they do at home; and what we do in the privacy of our houses they do out of doors in the open street, and nobody thinks the worse of them. Even the sexual act puts no one to the blush in this community.* [*Herodotus once more.*][1]

Some five hundred lines in this vein. Let us pass on.

Book III, however, forces us to revise our judgment of Apollonius utterly. It opens with an invocation to Erato, the Muse of love-poetry; and now the poet sets foot as a conqueror on a new continent—the poetry of passion. New, that is, if we can forget Sappho and Euripides.

At the beginning of the book we see Hera and Athena visiting Aphrodite. They wish her to let the boy Eros make Medea fall in love with Jason by piercing her with one of his arrows; then she will help the stranger to win the Golden Fleece.

The meeting of the goddesses is treated on a realistic note, with a certain humour.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 100–1.

Hera and Athena are treated like two highly-placed Alexandrian ladies calling on someone of inferior status, of whom they have come to ask a favour. Aphrodite is at her dressing-table doing her hair; she begs the ladies to sit down on fine chairs, and inquires to what she is indebted for so unaccustomed an honour. Hera is aware of the irony and concedes a point, but none the less makes her request. Aphrodite, still in her pose of humility, says that she will certainly ask her son, but she will be hard put to it to get him to obey; she speaks of him as a badly brought-up boy who cheeks his mother and even threatens her. Then, seeing the two ladies are only too pleased to hear her description, she wishes she had not said so much. The hint of feminine jealousies over other women's children, which lies behind this scene, gives it considerable piquancy.

Aphrodite finds her son on one of the lawns of Olympus playing knucklebones with Ganymede. He has become carried away by the game.

> *Eros, the greedy boy, was standing there with a whole handful of them clutched to his breast and a happy flush mantling his cheeks. Near by sat Ganymede, hunched up, silent and disconsolate, with only two left. He threw these for what they were worth in quick succession and was furious when Eros laughed.*[1]

Apollonius can bring off these genre pictures rather well; he is at his best in description.

Aphrodite comes up, takes her child by the chin, and calls him a 'little pest'. Before he will promise to help, she has to promise him 'a lovely toy'—a ball of gold rings, made for Zeus when he was a baby. The lad demands it 'now, immediately', but the mother will not give way—not till afterwards! The whole of this scene is typical of Alexandrian taste; it is a period which loves children, and likes to portray them in poetry as in sculpture. There are practically no children in classical literature and art, until Euripides at least.

Now the poet brings us, with Jason, to the palace of Aeëtes. Jason admires its wonders, the orchards, the vineyards, the palace itself. The grand-children of Aeëtes, whom Jason has met on his way, run to the arms of their mother Chalciope, Medea's sister. Amid general rejoicing the formal welcome takes place.

Meanwhile the god of love creeps into the crowd.

> *Meanwhile Eros, passing through the clear air, had arrived unseen and bent on mischief, like a gadfly setting out to plague the grazing heifers. . . . In the porch, under the lintel of the door, he quickly strung his bow and from his quiver took a new arrow, fraught with pain. Still unobserved, he ran across the threshold glancing around him sharply. Then he crouched low at Jason's feet, fitted the notch to the middle of the*

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

string, and drawing the bow as far as his hands would stretch, shot at Medea. And her heart stood still.

With a happy laugh Eros sped out of the high-roofed hall on his way back, leaving his shaft deep in the girl's breast, hot as fire. Time and again she darted a bright glance at Jason. All else was forgotten. Her heart, brimful of this new agony, throbbed within her and overflowed with the sweetness of the pain.

A working woman, rising before dawn to spin and needing light in her cottage room, piles brushwood on a smouldering log, and the whole heap kindled by the little brand goes up in a mighty blaze. Such was the fire of Love, stealthy but all-consuming, that swept through Medea's heart. In the turmoil of her soul, her soft cheeks turned from rose to white and white to rose.[1]

There, in verse of great beauty, is told how love takes possession of a girl's heart. The progress and the description of this passion take up the whole third book.

Meanwhile Jason has explained to Aeëtes why he has come. The king refuses him the Golden Fleece unless he can successfully accomplish certain tasks. He must tame two wild fire-breathing bulls, yoke them, and make them plough a field, then sow it with a dragon's teeth, and kill the armed giants which will spring up from these teeth. Jason hangs back, 'resourceless in the face of this dilemma', but at length undertakes the tasks with no idea how he can carry them out. As he leaves the palace the poet brings us back to Medea.

Jason rose from his chair. . . . As the party went out of the hall, Jason's comeliness and charm singled him out from all the rest; and Medea, plucking her bright veil aside, turned wondering eyes upon him. Her heart smouldered with pain and as he passed from sight her soul crept out of her, as in a dream, and fluttered in his steps. . . .

Medea too retired, a prey to all the inquietude that Love awakens. The whole scene was still before her eyes—how Jason looked, the clothes he wore, the things he said, the way he sat, and how he walked to the door. It seemed to her, as she reviewed these images, that there was nobody like Jason. His voice and the honey-sweet words that he had used still rang in her ears. But she feared for him. She was afraid that the bulls or Aeëtes with his own hands might kill him; and she mourned him as one already dead. The pity of it overwhelmed her; a round tear ran down her cheek; and weeping quietly she voiced her woes:

'What is the meaning of this grief? Hero or villain (and why should I care which?) the man is going to his death. Well, let him go! And yet I wish he had been spared. Yes, sovran Lady Hecate, this is my prayer. Let him live to reach his home. But if he

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 116–17.

must be conquered by the bulls, may he first learn that I for one do not rejoice in his cruel fate.'[1]

Jason takes counsel with his friends, and with Argos, the son of Chalciope, whom he has saved. The youth advises them to ask his mother to use her influence on Medea, who is a priestess of Hecate and an adept in magic, and could teach Jason a charm enabling him to fulfill the tasks. The advice is adopted, and from this moment all the thoughts of the Greeks, of Chalciope and of her sons, who are all now on Jason's side, are focused on Medea.

At the same time Medea comes of herself, through love, to the exact point where the others wish to bring her, though she has no idea as yet what will be demanded of her.

She has sunk into a sleep broken by dreams.

She dreamt that the stranger had accepted the challenge, not in the hope of winning the ram's fleece—it was not that that had brought him to Aea—but in order that he might carry her off to his own home as his bride. Then it seemed that it was she who was standing up to the bulls; she found it easy to handle them. But when all was done, her parents backed out of the bargain, pointing out that it was Jason, not their daughter, whom they had dared to yoke the bulls. This led to an interminable dispute between her father and the Argonauts, which resulted in their leaving the decision to her—she could do as she pleased. And she, without a moment's thought, turned her back on her parents and chose the stranger. Her parents were cut to the quick; they screamed in their anger; and with their cries she woke.

She sat up, shivering with fright, and peered round the walls of her bedroom. Slowly and painfully she dragged herself back to reality.[2]

At this moment of distress Medea feels the desire to go and talk to someone. She considers unburdening herself to her sister; but shame holds her back. She walks up and down barefooted outside her sister's door, then goes back to her own room and flings herself on her bed. The poet gives a long description of this conflict between 'shame and shameless desire'. At last a servant finds her in this state and hurries to tell the sister.

The two sisters' conversation is very finely done. Medea displays a remarkable and striking combination of ingenuous innocence with the reserve of a girl who has suddenly been touched by the passion of love, and at the same time the diplomacy which lovers learn by instinct—or 'impelled' as the poet puts it, 'by the bold hand of Love'. As for Chalciope, she is at once the mother trying to save her sons from danger and the elder sister sorry for the younger.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 121–2. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 126.

It is a most skilful scene, built up on sound and subtle psychology. The two sisters hardly mention 'the stranger' in their midnight talk. All Medea's feelings for Jason are hinted at and left in shadow. What they discuss is how to save Chalciope's sons if Aeëtes decides to include them in the punishment he will inflict on the strangers. We are made to feel, too, that Medea has a very real affection for her sister's children, with whom she has been brought up (she is the same age as they are—the poet adroitly finds means to assure us that their Aunt Medea is still quite young)—even while she is trying to use this affection to serve a different and far stronger passion. By what she says of her love for her nephews, Medea makes Chalciope even more alarmed than before, so that in the end it is she who entreats Medea to save the stranger in order to save her children—which was just what Medea had planned, with the new-found guile of love.

Chalciope said: 'Well now, for the sake of my sons, could you not devise some cunning ruse that the stranger could rely on in his trial? He needs you just as much as they do.' . . . At this, Medea's heart leapt up. Her lovely cheeks were crimsoned and her eyes grew dim with tears of joy.[1]

She promises everything, and agrees to meet Jason the next day at the temple of Hecate, and give him a charm which will make him invincible.

And yet no sooner has her sister left her alone than she falls back into her old hesitations and mental struggles. Maiden modesty returns, and she fears to do this thing for an unknown man against her own father. All the rest of the night is full of such conflicts. At times she wishes she could see Jason die, to be released from her passion and pain. 'Indeed I am ill-starred, for even if he dies I have no hope of happiness.' At other times she takes joy in the thought of saving the man she loves—until suddenly a new tide of shame brings her to despair once more, and she decides to end it all by killing herself. Then she takes out a casket containing poisons, lays it on her knees, opens it and chooses a fatal poison, weeping the while over her own sad lot.

But suddenly she was overcome by the hateful thought of death, and for a long time stayed her hand in silent horror. Visions of life and all its fascinating cares rose up before her.... She thought of her happy playmates, as a young girl will. And now, setting its true value on all this, it seemed to her a sweeter thing to see the sun than it had ever been before. So, prompted by Here, she changed her mind and put the box away. Irresolute no longer, she waited eagerly for Dawn to come, so that she could meet the stranger face to face and give him the magic drug as she had promised. Time after time

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 128–9.

she opened her door to catch the first glimmer of day; and she rejoiced when early Dawn lit up the sky and people in the town began to stir.[1]

We have reached the climax of the poem. Nothing later will surpass this depiction of the vacillations of a heart invaded and torn by passion. It should be noted also that nowhere has the poet been more original than here. This time at least, when his heroine welcomes the approach of death, then finally rejects the idea of suicide because the primitive love of life proves too strong, the poet is indebted to no models; he is simply listening to the two contrary voices of love as he hears them in his own heart.

I will however quote a few more passages, from the conversation of Medea with Jason. The interest is focused on Medea, so that we need not be too conscious of the other's inadequacy.

First we see the girl's agitation as she waits for the man she loves.

Meanwhile Medea, though she was singing and dancing with her maids, could think of one thing only. There was no melody, however gay, that did not quickly cease to please. Time and again she faltered and came to a halt. To keep her eyes fixed on her choir was more than she could do. She was for ever turning them aside to search the distant paths, and more than once she well-nigh fainted when she mistook the noise of the wind for the footfall of a passer-by.

But it was not so very long before the sight of Jason rewarded her impatient watch. Like Sirius rising from Ocean, brilliant and beautiful but full of menace for the flocks, he sprang into view, splendid to look at but fraught with trouble for the lovesick girl. Her heart stood still, a mist descended on her eyes, and a warm flush spread across her cheeks. She could neither move towards him nor retreat; her feet were rooted to the ground. And now her servants disappeared, and the pair of them stood face to face without a word or sound, like oaks or tall pines that stand in the mountains side by side in silence when the air is still, but when the wind has stirred them chatter without end. So these two, stirred by the breath of Love, were soon to pour out all their tale.[2]

—What a strange, magnificent image, likening the pair to trees which first stand motionless then 'stir and murmur without ending'!

Jason makes his request, and Medea trembles for joy.

Jason's homage melted Medea. Turning her eyes aside she smiled divinely and then, uplifted by his praise, she looked him in the face. How to begin, she did not know; she longed so much to tell him everything at once. But with the charm, she did not hesitate; she drew it out from her sweet-scented girdle and he took it in his hands with joy. She revelled in his need of her and would have poured out all her soul to him as well, so

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 131. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 134–5.

captivating was the light of love that streamed from Jason's golden head and held her gleaming eyes. Her heart was warmed and melted like the dew on roses under the morning sun. . . .

But at last Medea forced herself to speak to him.[1]

I shall not quote this speech. Medea conceals her confusion and her real feelings by an abundance of detailed directions for the use of the spell which will give Jason victory in his ordeal. Near the end, however, she yields to the temptation to think of herself: an impulse at first restrained and timid, which gathers assurance as she proceeds and ends with an almost direct avowal of love.

'And so the task is done and you can carry off the fleece to Hellas—a long, long way from Aea, I believe. Go none the less, go where you will; go where the fancy takes you when you part from us.'

After this, Medea was silent for a while. She kept her eyes fixed on the ground, and the warm tears ran down her lovely cheeks as she saw him sailing off over the high seas far away from her. Then she looked up at him and sorrowfully spoke again, taking his right hand in hers and no longer attempting to conceal her love. She said:

'But do remember, if you ever reach your home. Remember the name of Medea, and I for my part will remember you when you are far away.'

A little later the tone becomes more threatening.

'But oh, at least remember me when you are back in Iolcus; and I, despite my parents, will remember you. And may there come to me some whisper from afar, some bird to tell the tale, when you forget me. Or may the Storm-Winds snatch me up and carry me across the sea to Iolcus, to denounce you to your face and remind you that I saved your life. That is the moment I would choose to pay an unexpected visit to your house.'[2]

A magnificent awakening of woman's jealousy in a girl in love. Jason succeeds in reassuring her, promising to marry her and be faithful; and the lovers part in hopes of another meeting.

The third book ends with the account of how Jason fights against the bulls and tames them, then against the giants that spring from the dragon's teeth and reaps that harvest vigorously. We are back in the routine of epic, and interest has disappeared.

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After the fine passages quoted from book III, it would be unkind to continue our study of the *Argonautica* by summarizing the fourth and last book.

This interminable book IV tells the story of the long-drawn-out return of the

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 136.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 137–9.

Argonauts to Europe. On Central and Western Europe, as well as North Africa, Apollonius has vast stores of geographical knowledge to unload. Traditions preserved in poetry, scientific or would-be scientific information culled from works on the countries in question which were beginning to come out in his time (it was the age of Eratosthenes)—all this, and it represents a huge bulk, is poured out together in book IV to form a fantastic journey—the longest possible route by which the Argo can be brought back to her point of departure by water.

Apollonius has worked out a kind of North-West Passage for her. He takes her up the Danube, whence, first of all, she reaches the Adriatic by an arm of the river which flows out that way (such a belief was held by Aeschylus and Aristotle); next, journeying up the Po and one of its tributaries, she makes her way into the 'land of the Celtic lakes'—which is undoubtedly Switzerland (the first mention of our country in Greek literature); then, entering the Rhine by means of a tributary, she follows its course until turned back by a terrible cry from Hera, playing the part of the Lorelei; and at last ascends a watercourse issuing from the Lake of Neuchâtel (already known at this date through the prehistoric settlement at La Tène) and in the Canton of Vaud, believe it or not, contrives to leave the Rhine basin and enter that of the Rhône. How? Simply through that tiny puddle which the Vaudois jestingly proclaim to be the 'Middle of the World' because two streams flow out of it, one of which eventually joins each of these great rivers. From this point the good ship, with the Golden Fleece and the romance of Medea on board, has only to make her way down the Venoge and the Rhône to reach the Mediterranean.

This extraordinary route cannot be followed without certain misgivings. It is geography gone mad—rivers run in both directions, mountains, though they are there and indicated precisely (if not always described correctly), seem to form no obstacle. In reality Apollonius has worked everything out perfectly to obtain his absurd maximum itinerary. When he does not know where else to turn, he calls on Hera, his goddess *ex machina*. To take one example—at a moment of extreme peril, when he has to cause the Nereids to play ball with the Argo to get it safely through Charybdis and Scylla, Apollonius has the idea of making Hera approach their mother Thetis with the curious entreaty, 'Though a mother-in-law, aid your daughter-in-law!' To understand this, we need to know that an oracle has foretold the marriage of Medea with Achilles (Thetis' son) in Hades. Fair enough: but the full silliness of Hera's plea is seen when we realize that obviously, until Medea does die, the oracle cannot be fulfilled. Ineptitudes like this abound in the fourth book of the *Argonautica*.

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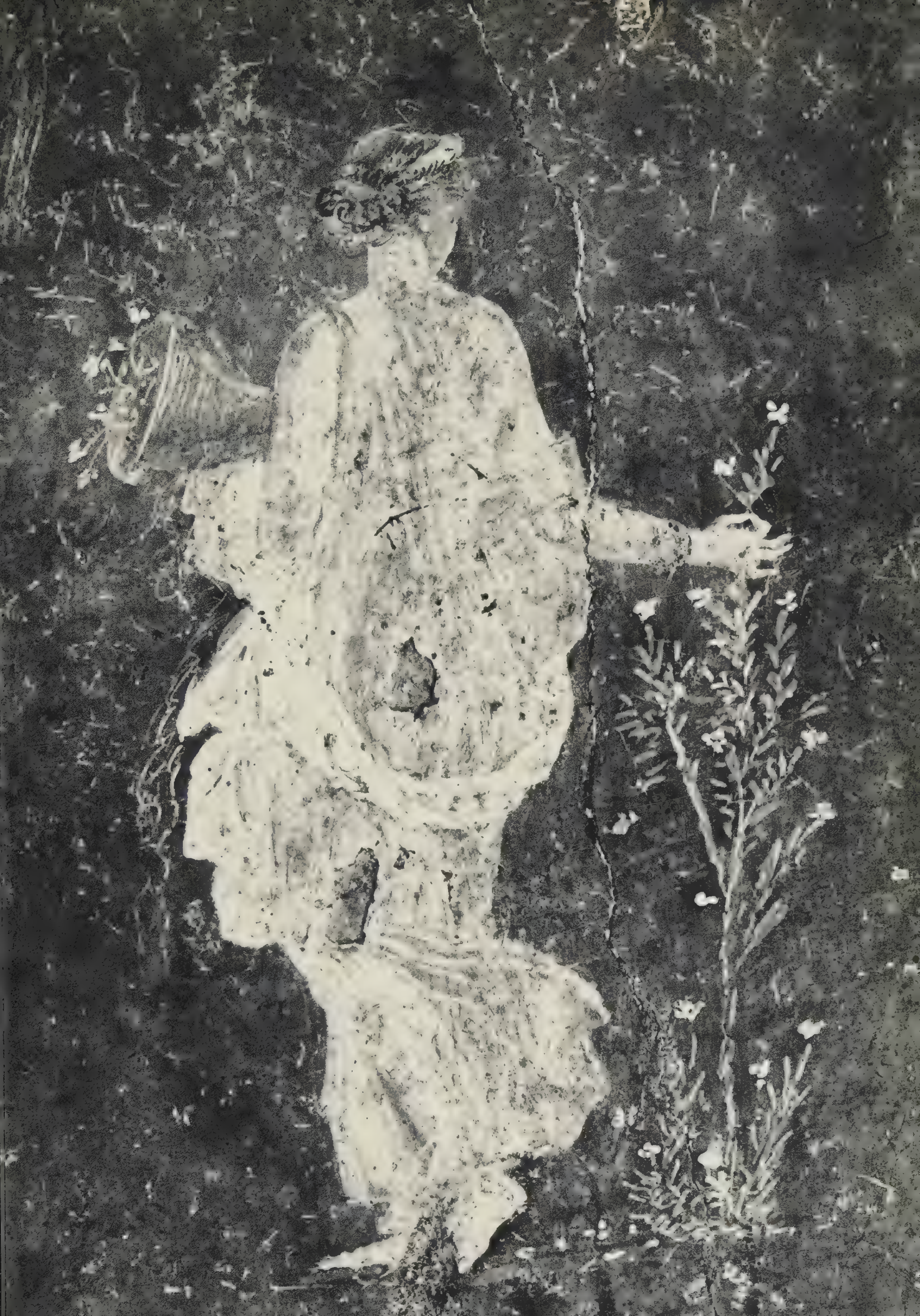
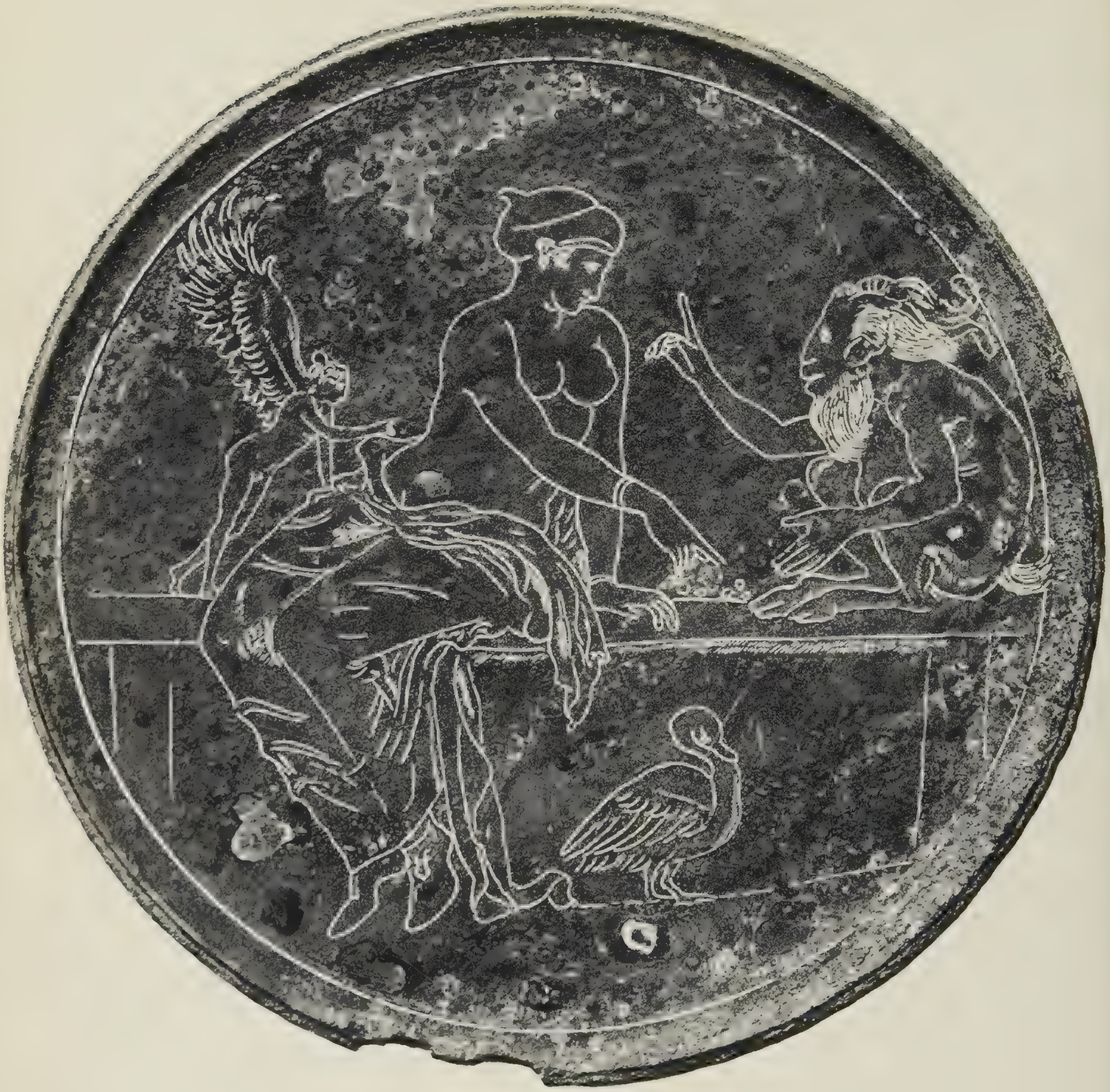
33. *Flora gathering flowers. Pompeii*





It is time to sum up. The *Argonautica* is a failure. Apollonius was a poet, but much closer to Callimachus, the master he turned against, than he ever realized. He was also more affected than he ever knew by the tastes of his contemporaries: he shared their passion for erudition, which is fatal to poetry (his specialism was geography). At the same time he had a deep love for old Homer, and in his ambitious youth believed he could equal him. So it is not surprising that our poet—a very gifted one, in fits—cast the touching love-story he set out to tell in the unlikely form of a geographical epic. For the epic he had no talent; like all the learned of the time, he was incapable of composing on the grand scale.

What is more, he is absolutely unable to make any contact in himself between that love for geographical lore and his poetic imagination or artistic sensibility. The poetry never sets fire to the erudition. There are two men in Apollonius, and the two are not on speaking terms. His work puts side by side two things which remain absolutely separate—a love-romance and a geographical treatise. Let it be admitted that the two 'subjects', love and geography, corresponded to two propensities of Apollonius, two sides of his nature; but this means, since he has not managed to work them into a unity in his poem, that his personality was not strong enough to create its own unity. The poet in him was beaten, and accepted the imposition of a contemporary fashion most dangerous for poetry, which left him finally suffocated under a weight of erudition he could not assimilate and could not humanize.

But Apollonius was mistaken, not only in the nature and scope of his gifts, but in the choice of the best literary genre for its expression. That genre was not the epic—he had only chosen it, in an irresponsible schoolboy way, because it was the genre his old master condemned. What he might have founded, had he possessed a deeper insight into his own powers, was the novel of love—which did take rise, only a few centuries after his time, from this blend of love and adventure, of thwarted passion and globe-trotting, that we shall find, if not perhaps exactly in *Daphnis and Chloe*, at least in the *Ephesiaca* of Xenophon the Ephesian. In this, the last creative path opened up by the Greek genius which had invented so many genres of literature, Apollonius was a precursor unknown to himself.

Our task is not to rewrite the history of literature. We will simply say that Apollonius could not get Homer out of his mind, and thought himself a second Homer. An English critic calls his attempt an 'ambitious failure'. But his title to fame still remains—that he was, without having known it, or wished it, or entirely achieved it, the first writer of Greek romance.

Let us be just to him: he is a poet, sometimes even a great poet. We may add, weighing our words with care, that his poetry was the outcome of a romantic temperament. It is not our purpose to offer one more definition of romanticism—

34. *Engraving on the back of a bronze mirror from Corinth. London, British Museum*

simply to remark that from this story of passion told by Apollonius there rises a perfume of romance; that in emotion as in incident it runs to the blackest shadows and the brightest lights. One of the essential features of the romantic temperament is a love of extremes, and even more of passing from one extreme to its opposite; and any story of passion will lend itself to these vivid contrasts of values.

His subject was not badly chosen, a part of it at least. He feels very keenly, in Medea and her adventure, the contrast formed by an extremely violent passion falling on a simple girl, attacking a soul which is ingenuous, almost naïve, almost childish. At the first scene of the 'romance', the romantic *coup de foudre* that comes to Medea on seeing Jason strikes this note of violent contrast. The most modest of maidens, the most unschooled in love, falls victim to spellbound passion at its most irresistible.

And she yields herself totally to this sentiment, this enchantment, as she gives herself unreservedly to the stranger; but at the same time, at every moment, she draws back or tries to draw back totally. What else is romanticism but these contraries generating one another and succeeding one another constantly in human hearts? In the hours of that night following her *coup de foudre*, the character of Medea is built up on the antithesis between total purity and total passion. She is tossed unceasingly from heaven to hell, as Victor Hugo might have put it; she seeks refuge in death and rebounds towards life with equal fervour. The scene of the casket opened on her knees, that she may take poison and be done with life, her tears over her own fate, and suddenly those images of life which rise up in her at the contact with death and throw her back towards joy and love for Jason—all this is a scene of the most consummate romanticism (and the original meaning of 'consummate' is 'perfect'). In this respect I believe it to be unique in Greek literature.

But in addition to this romanticism of passion and the effects of contrast which it provides, there is another vein in Apollonius which may be called romantic, without straining the term—it is a particular way in which nature is made to share the emotional states of the hero. By modern romanticists—as already by Virgil—nature is felt as being in harmony, or else in disharmony, with human sentiments. They call on her to suffer with us, or else they are indignant that she can remain unmoved by our sufferings. But it is the same thing in either case—nature is felt subjectively, existing only by virtue of her relations with our emotional states. Now that is a form of sensibility in regard to nature which is very rare in antiquity. (Sappho, occasionally, will involve nature in her moods of passion.) Nature, for the classical poets who refer to her, is a reality with an existence of her own, a great divine reality—in which man has indeed his place, but from whom a poet would never think of expecting reactions attuned to what he feels.

I note that, although Medea does not expressly appeal to a sympathetic nature, her emotive states are displayed against a décor which might have been made to fit the sentiments she experiences. Like more than one romantic heroine, Medea needs moonlight; and, twice over, she gets her moon. The moon is rising over the horizon when she forsakes her father's dwelling, and moreover—what could be more romantic?—it rises just as she passes through a graveyard. Another passage shows her in the window of her room, watching the moon rise and catching its rays in the pleats of her finely-woven shift. One critic sees in this episode the typical tone of German romanticism.

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We must leave Apollonius; to forget to conclude is a mistake that he himself made only too often in that fourth book of his. He had numerous descendants, which proves that his work, artificial as it is and clogged by the pressure of the environment and the weight of classical tradition, was nevertheless not entirely backward-looking. The Greek novel, as I have said, sprang from his poem; but he had a far more illustrious heir—Virgil, who in writing the love-song of Aeneas and Dido in the fourth book of the *Aeneid* perfected and transfigured the third book of the *Argonautica*. The wonderful poem of Dido's passion follows Medea's step by step. We do not read Apollonius: what was best in him has gone into this book of the *Aenid*; Virgil has absorbed him, using up the last crumb. He has done more than absorb, he has obliterated him, annihilated him, pushed him outside the confines of living literature. He has almost everywhere perfected what sometimes in Apollonius was only partly brought off.

One example will suffice. In a rather fine passage of the fourth book of the *Argonautica* (and we have seen that these are not over-numerous) the Argonauts, after being cast up on the shore of Libya, go without water for days and days in the desert; suddenly the night breeze brings them a mysterious sound like that of footsteps over the sand. Some of them go out to see what it is, and Lynceus of the piercing eyesight

thought he saw a lonely figure on the verge of that vast land, as a man, when the month begins, sees or thinks he sees the new moon through the clouds.[1]

The simile is beautiful in itself, but it is not exactly appropriate: Heracles and the sickle moon make a slightly discordant pair, so that in the end the simile fails in its effect and appears an adventitious embellishment. Virgil makes use of the passage in his description of the descent to the Underworld, where Aeneas 'recognizes in the shadows', in two lines translated from Apollonius . . .—but first we must quote them in the Latin:

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 187.

agnovitque per umbras
Obscuram qualem primo qui surgere mense
Aut vidit aut vidisse putat per nubila lunam.

Only, who is it that Aeneas recognizes in the shadows (*obscuram*) 'as one fancies one can see the new moon through the clouds'? Not stout Heracles, who was never in the least like a ghost or a fleeting vision, but pale Dido in the myrtle grove. By this change the force of the simile is transformed; at once everything is in its rightful place, and the poetic emotion finds no discord to distract it.

The poetry of Apollonius, I repeat, is not an entirely backward-looking creation; his genius advances haltingly towards something ahead. It is no trifle to have paved the way for the love-novel and for one of the forms of Romanticism, that of Virgil.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE PARADISE OF THEOCRITUS

Theocritus: poetry for leisure. Greek poetry, all Greek literature, had been serious, profoundly so, from Homer to Aristophanes. Yes, for all his capers and cartwheels, and his clown's patter making laughter hold both his sides, Aristophanes himself is serious. Furthermore, it is just that deep seriousness that enables him to perform his somersaults and cartwheels midway between heaven and earth without one slip, without for a split second incurring the risk of falling otherwise than laughing and serene, on his two feet.

Certainly Greek literature aimed at the entertainment of the listener, the pleasure of the reader; but by communicating this pleasure it aimed at being useful to the community, effective in its action. Even tragedy, the chief among the Greeks' literary inventions, put into men's hands, through knowledge of the horror of our human lot, an instrument of wisdom, resistance and liberation. Such was Greek literature, at all events as long as communities existed; it was that reflection of man upon his own nature, that marshalling of energy with a view to common action. One thing it never was—mere diversion, distraction, irresponsibility.

But by now the city-states had disappeared. Nothing was left, in the great towns, but individuals pursuing individual pleasures. Literature came to be one of these pleasures, one reserved for those who found their pastime in self-cultivation in accordance with good taste. For the underdog and the illiterate nothing very much was offered, except military reviews or prima donnas. But to those who made a point of culture Theocritus offered his sophisticated poetry, rural poetry for city-dwellers.

Theocritus wrote idylls. As he and his time used the term, it meant no more than a short poem of some hundred lines. In keeping his work short, he was following the counsel more than once given by Callimachus; he had also taken the measure of his own inspiration, which certainly lacked stamina for tragedy or epic.

However—acting here too on the explicit encouragement of Callimachus—

Theocritus did attempt a few very short epic poems. The only one fully to succeed, and the only one I shall refer to, is the *Cyclops*. Theocritus goes back to a character and a subject well known in Greek myth—Polyphemus in love with the nymph Galatea—and treats them in a lightly realistic and humorous vein. He gives us the uncouth lover that the girls laugh at; and it needs all his art to take such a figure of fun, with a kindly nature which can never show because of his vast bulk, and make something touching out of him, to retain from the laughter he arouses no more than a smile, and in all this to achieve a very simple and very genuine emotion. It seems incredibly daring, for instance, to let such a lover speak the lovers' jargon of the day with its precious or turgid metaphors, its bizarre images, and by so doing move us to pity and mirth at the same time.

So, then, we listen to Polythemus as he sits on one of the rocks on the sea coast, calling to Galatea, who sports unseen in the deep. We are forced to smile at the conceits with which he hopes to win his fair one—he wishes, for instance, that she would with her own hand set fire to his soul, and burn his brow and that single eye which is dearer to him than anything beside; he wishes that his mother had brought him into the world with gills so that he might dive into the waters where his beloved hides. These touches—which are not very numerous—move us because they show up the simplicity of the speaker who only uses such a style in hopes of pleasing.

Still more touching does he become when he asks pardon of his beloved for his ugliness—that ugliness which he never realized till he fell in love. Touching, because love, far from making him brutal, strong as he is, fills him with delicacy of feeling. He only asks of Galatea that she should come and sit in his hut—

But if my body seem too rough and shaggy for your taste,
Well, neath the ashes on my hearth oak-logs are ever smouldering,
And gladly would I suffer, . . .
[*I would*] *have kissed your hand,*
If your lips would not let me. . . .

Naïve and touching, also, by the presents he wants to give her.

Eleven fawns
I'm rearing for you, all with brows crescent-masked, and four bear-cubs.
. . . I had brought you then
Either white snowdrops, or the soft, scarlet-petalled poppy.
Nay, but these blow in summer, those in winter months.
So I could never bring you both these kinds at the same time.[1]

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[1] *The Idylls of Theocritus*, translated by R. C. Trevelyan, 1947, p. 38.

In this way, out of his love and his sorrow, Polyphemus makes poetry. It is easy to see how Theocritus is applying the rules of Callimachus, modernizing the myth by means of realism and up-to-date psychology; but at the same time he leaves these behind. His Cyclops, it is true, is a shepherd like the rest, no longer a creature of myth but a bashful lover like the common run of men, and a peasant who asks his sweetheart to

Be content to go shepherding and milk the flocks with me,
And learn to set the cheeses, pouring tart rennet in.[1]

So far we have the realistic stage in the process of modernizing the myth; but that stage is not the end, for this lover and countryman is a poet, and his soul transfigures the world he lives in, the things around him, and his occupations and feelings into a world where beauty is supreme.

The whole poem is a song, and the poetic themes that appear one after the other seem to be on the point of falling into stanzas. But Theocritus does not let them: he leaves the tide of sentiment to flow in waves of slightly uneven length. But this is real lyric poetry all the same. We are no longer dealing with observation and exact reproduction of sentiments or objects; the aim is, from something observed, from some first-hand experience of love—from the 'given' matter whatever it is—to create beauty.

O white Galateia, wherefore thus cast off the man who loves you?
Whiter to look upon than curds, more delicate than a lamb,
Than a young calf more skittish, plumper than ripening grape![2]

The trivial 'given' basis here becomes no more than a slender carrier for the waves of poetry.

Thus we enter into a world on the confines of life and dreaming. What the poet gives us is not so much life as a wonderful dream made out of life: the dream of passion, the pain of love, made serene and luminous, transfigured into poetry.

We are already far away from Callimachus, who, faced with ancient myths which irritated him by their conventionality, could only scrape down the superannuated old beauties and give us an honest view of the undercoat, the rather dull and prosaic level, of mythology. Theocritus is a poet; give him what you will, an old myth, a clownish lover, and the most everyday of objects, curdled milk, ripening grapes, a calf in a field—any reality becomes radio-active for him, and gives off freshness and beauty.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 39. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Before we go further and attempt to introduce one or two of the most original works of Theocritus, we must not forget to make the point that he was the first creator, for the Greeks and for us, of a new literary genre which has had tremendous success in modern times—a genre originally entitled rustic mime, pastoral, or bucolic, then idyll or eclogue in the modern acceptation of those terms. The pastoral is, with the novel, the last of the genres invented by the Greeks. What does it matter if the mime—rustic or otherwise—is a secondary genre, a painting of life foreshortened and cramped by its narrow frame? What does it matter if the new genre, the mime of Theocritus and Herodas (I shall return to this name and to the birth of the mime proper, in the next chapter) is to the drama what the epigram is to the great lyric of classical times, what the individual is to the communities of old? It matters little, so long as, on its new scale, the scale of the period, art is still flawless, and the poet, in the framework he has marked out for himself, still has equal ability to give pleasure. In any event, it is an interesting thing to be able to witness the birth of a genre, at the very end of the history of Greek poetry, and in historical conditions which are clearer—or let us say less obscure—than at the birth of the great early genres, epic, lyric and drama. It is interesting, particularly, to note that the birth-process of the rustic mime seems not very different from that of its great elders.

The poetic genres came into being in Greece under more natural conditions than at the time of our Renaissance, when the most important of them were created in imitation of their newly-discovered originals of antiquity. The Greeks never had any earlier literature to copy. No one has ever maintained, and presumably no one will ever maintain, that Greek epic, lyric or tragedy sprang from contact with comparable genres created in Egypt, Assyria or Sumeria. In fact what we can see fairly clearly in Greece is that epic, tragedy and the rest spring from popular poetic usages and traditions. Among the people existed heroic tales, or songs, hymns or dances, sacred games, or grotesque mimicries, flourishing in great abundance on the occasion of religious festivals or labour festivals. They were raised to the standard of a literary genre by a poet or poets giving artistic form to what in popular usage had been formless, or imposing strict rules on inspiration by the authority of their own genius. But when a great poet created—invented—a genre (and there is none that does not bear at its origin the stamp of some great artist, the signature of the creator who gave it being), the constituents, the themes, the tone, were nevertheless those that he had found in the poetry of the people. Such seems always to have been the process in Greece—a poetic tradition of the people becoming fertilized by a creative genius.

Everything that Homer—and perhaps two or three men of genius before him—did for the epic, or that Thespis, Phrynicus and Aeschylus did for tragedy under historical conditions which are hardly less obscure, or that Cratinus, and Aristophanes, did in shaping comedy out of the *phallica* and Megaran farce—just as much was done by Theocritus in the final stages of Greek literature, when he invented the rustic mime. He took his inspiration from the usages of popular poetry in Sicily or the Greek settlements of Italy, but with these he mingled certain tendencies of Alexandrian literature: a fusion, a marriage between popular traditions and literary trends which succeeded and was fruitful because it was presided over by the genius of one particular poet, Theocritus.

This marriage I wish to examine for a moment.

A form of popular poetry existed among the Sicilian peasants, in the third century B.C. and earlier—primarily a matter of working-songs to make labour easier, as we find them in many countries. Traces of this remain in the poetry of Theocritus; for example in the song of the field-labourer Milo which I shall quote later, and which is like the songs sung until quite lately by our own farm-hands. But in Sicily there was also a poetical practice that was far more original; ancient writers speak of it by the name of 'bucoliasm'. It was an impromptu song sung alternately by two shepherds, on themes drawn from country life. These improvisations took the form of a competition, a poetic contest. We know what love the Greeks had for competition, for the *agôn*, as they called it; it was among their favourite sports, one of the natural diversions of Greek life. The poetic contest could take a very simple form—after the two singers had challenged one another, each sang his song in turn, and an arbiter they had agreed on decided between them. But, in 'bucoliasm' properly so called, the two singers alternated, short improvised stanzas passing to and fro like tennis-balls. The ancients also use another term for this: they speak of 'amoebaean' songs, which means precisely 'singing in turns'.

The rules of these competitions were very strict. One of the singers, either the challenger or one chosen by lot, improvised a short lay, of two lines usually, on some country theme. Then his rival had to improvise a variation on the same theme, in a lay of the same length and the same rhythmical form. Then the first put forward a new theme, the second improvised a new variation on it; and so it continued until one admitted defeat or the arbiter stopped the proceedings by announcing the winner.

The contest in the fifth idyll, 'Goatherd and Shepherd', between Komatas and Lacon,[1] seem to come very close to the old usage. Here are some of the exchanges. Komatas has set the theme—wild flowers and garden flowers; Lacon replies with wild fruit and sweet fruit.

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[1] To use here the spelling adopted by our translation (pp. 20–1).

Komatas. *Nay, who would liken the dog-thorn or windflower to the rose,*
That blossoms in its rose-bed beneath the garden wall?
Lakon. *Nor should one liken medlars to acorns; for to these*
The oak-tree gives a bitter husk, but those are sweet as honey.

Later comes this:

Komatas. *But I will give my maiden a ring-dove, which I'll steal*
To-morrow from the juniper-tree; for there it sits and broods.
Lakon. *But I, when next I shear the dusky ewe, will freely give*
The soft fleece to my Kratides, to make of it a cloak.

Further on Komatas propounds the theme of foxes that are spoiling a neighbour's vines; Lacon rejoins with another neighbour's fig-trees which have been ravaged by beetles. So it goes on; in these lays we are very close to popular tradition.

We may suppose that shepherds practised these improvisations as they kept their flocks. The half-leisure of pastoral life, in a mild climate, was favourable to the cultivation of poetic talent. The ancients tell us that the most renowned of these improvisers entered contests organized by certain towns in Sicily at the festivals of Artemis, who, in Dorian lands, was the goddess of flocks as well as of the chase.

If such poetic customs seem extraordinary to us, it is because we are northerners, less ready at repartee, slower at finding our words. Our very culture in a sense has made us clumsier. As a writer of Vaud has put it, 'We have too much culture for agriculture.' Yet usages resembling the bucoliasm of the time of Theocritus are attested in very recent times, even up to the beginning of the twentieth century, in certain Mediterranean countries: among Corsican shepherds, among Serbian swineherds, and, to seek no further afield, in Sicily, where the last representatives of what must be a thousand-year-old tradition now bear the name of *sfide*.

Be this as it may, there is no doubt about the existence of a popular pastoral kind of poetry in Sicily in the days of Theocritus, even apart from 'bucoliasm'. When he created rustic mime, Theocritus was using conscious art to transpose on to the plane of literary poetry a setting, with characters, themes and a number of legends which come from a poetry belonging entirely to the people; so much is certain. Take this example of a song sung at harvest-time by the journeyman-labourer Milo and attributed by him to the legendary patron of harvesters, named Lityerses. It has the practical down-to-earth style of that old peasant Hesiod. It is full of sayings taken from rustic lore, together with jests and images in very popular vein. Where exactly does art begin, that alchemy which turns crude poetic material into precious metal? Impossible to say; nor does it matter. Assuredly the starting-point is authentic peasant stuff, and its roots drive deep into the earth:

Demeter, rich in fruit and grain, grant thou that this year's crop
Be quickly reaped and gathered in, and fruitful beyond hope.
Bind tight the sheaves, ye bandsters, lest passers-by should say,
'These are mere men of fig-wood. 'Tis wages thrown away.'

. . . . . .

They that thresh corn should shun the noonday sleep. When the sun's high,
Then is the time that chaff from straw will part most easily.
But reapers should start toiling when the lark leaves his nest,
And cease work when he sleeps; but in the noonday heat should rest.
The frog's life is most jolly, my lads; he has no care
Who shall fill up his cup; for he has drink enough to spare.
You miserly stewards, boil us better lentil soup. Take heed,
You're sure to cut your finger, splitting that cummin seed.[1]

This was chosen as an example of one of the things that Theocritus started from, which gives his work such great strength. He laid the rustic mime, which he invented, on a foundation of genuine country life. He is not, then, a mere scholar inventing a new genre lock, stock and barrel: his invention is nothing in the first place but a discovery, the discovery of a vein of popular poetry. This he collects—though not as a folklore specialist would—re-works its matter and its form, and, out of the necessarily uneven attempts of the improvisers, creates a work of art.

◆

But if Theocritus is not merely a learned poet, he is a learned poet as well as other things, not only in the sense that he has given literary existence to a popular tradition, but also in the sense that in the rustic mime he was continuing a literary tradition. We should not forget that before Theocritus there had already been mimes, that is to say realistic compositions in dialogue reproducing scenes from everyday life.

There is nothing more perfect in the realistic mime than the *Women of Syracuse*,[2] by Theocritus. The eternal unchanging substance of bourgeois existence, of bourgeois 'mentality' (a ghastly word, but I use it deliberately), is painted in full daylight here, but painted with the sure touch of a still-life master. There is not a detail that does not make us see the two cronies and hear their conversation retailed to the life—we have their laments on the stupidity of husbands, we have the little maid who is always catching it because that is what she is there for, we have the cries of horror at the price of a new dress, and the complaints about the misdeeds of the cat. Then there is their way of bringing up their children—'baby darling' one moment, scolded the next, and threatened with the bogey-man. Later the poem follows them into the street, among the crowd; it is a festival day at the palace, and an entertainment (a rather silly one) has been got up for the sightseers, so our bourgeois ladies—who are provincials into the bargain, Syracusans in Alexandria, as it might be ladies from Lyons visiting Paris—marvel open-mouthed at everything, the traffic, the mounted police; are offended at being pushed; are afraid of getting lost; accept the assistance of a courteous gentleman; have words with a bad-tempered gentleman; and at last, outside the palace, conscientiously applaud a famous prima donna whose pretentious song is reported by Theocritus not without irony.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[2] Cf. pp. 170–1.

All this has been hit off with extraordinary accuracy. If the picturesque details are not as spicily realistic as some we shall come across in Herodas, they have their savour. Mimes like the *Women of Syracuse* show that Theocritus shared the taste of his time for realistic subjects and handling. His depiction of bourgeois behaviour satisfies a desire which haunts the poets of his time, and of any late period in a literature—to do something new, something 'authentic'. The same desire for novelty with authenticity was satisfied in the nineteenth century by the literature of exoticism, from Hugo's *Orientales* to Pierre Loti. And when Alexandrians went after the Sicilian, the exotic or the provincial in their literature, Sicily, to them, was the same thing as Japan or Brittany to our grandfathers.

But the stroke of genius was when Theocritus took the realistic mime in vogue, and suddenly gave it new subject-matter—not the bourgeois or exotic reality favoured by his contemporaries, but pastoral reality. He may not have been the first to think of it: Hesiod was in fashion. But if there were others making rural or pastoral poetry out of Hesiod—that is to say, out of literature—he made it, and he was the first, out of the life of the Sicilian shepherds which he had known or shared, from the songs he had heard them sing, the landscapes he had loved—from his own childhood and the life he had dreamed of as a peasant poet.

For others around him realism was simply a literary trend; but he integrated it with the enchanted world he had loved and borne in his mind since he was a child. He integrated it into his poetry—and his poetry went beyond it.

◆

The poetic world of Theocritus is at once *truth* and *poetry*. Truth, that is to say faithful transcription of the data of sense and experience. Poetry, which means—very briefly—the use of sounds, rhythms, choice of sensations, images, to transmute truth into beauty. But no poetic universe can be beautiful if it is not first founded on truth. That of Theocritus is, astonishingly so.

His shepherds are no imaginary shepherds: they are authentic. They are not idle, they look after their beasts where the rocky pastures of Sicily run steeply down to the sea. Their calling is no sinecure; sometimes the animals get out of hand and they call them to order with the local cry of 'sitta'—a call corresponding to the 'aria' of the Alpine 'ranz des vaches'. Thus Corydon goes running after his calves who have broken out of their meadow into the olive-orchards and are nibbling the branches, and as he runs he picks up a nasty thorn in his foot.

Nor do the shepherds forget to water their animals; they know where the springs are to be found. Milking is not passed over, and the different vessels the shepherd uses, whether for milking, or letting the milk stand, or for drinking, as well as the different wicker baskets, all have their own names, peculiar to their shapes and uses.

Theocritus indicates his shepherds' costumes—skins, or garments made out of the wool of their sheep. 'Your goatskins stink even worse than you do' says Lacon to Komatas. In the treatment of what critics call 'local colour', Theocritus makes great play with local odour, the true smells of flocks and peasants.

The truth of his painting extends to the dwellings, which are typical of Sicilian life, or of southern Italy. During the fine season the shepherds do not leave the mountainside, moving from *alpage* to *alpage*, where they sleep out in the open air; but they also have caves where they set up their kitchens, living a partly troglodyte existence which has still not died out in Calabria.

As for the flora and fauna, they are extremely rich. Never do we find stylized scenery such as that of the 'bergeries' at the end of French classicism, where every type of tree and species of plant is included under some generic expression like 'ravissants bocages', 'molles prairies'. Trees, shrubs, flowers, are called by their own name, names both exact and musical. The landscape has birds in plenty too (including night birds), insects, lizards, frogs. In the richness of animal and vegetable life in his idylls, Theocritus shows himself the true son of the two great Greek poets who have loved beasts and trees most—Homer and Aristophanes. We need not make lists; it is clear that Theocritus is one of those poets for whom the outside world—the countryside—exists with plenitude, with richness, and forces itself upon man's senses. Not a Virgilian view of nature overlaid with the melancholy of the inner man, but a world we feel with our senses, a nature which makes us glad to exist, a countryside we breathe in with all our lungs.

All this, although the poet never finds it necessary to describe a landscape methodically. Never in Theocritus, any more than in Homer, is nature a pretext for picturesque description. To bring us into contact with the life of things he uses great simplicity of means, great economy of line. Brief notations, embedded in the poem as if at random, make us savour a fleeting shade in the sky or sea, or the shape of a cypress, the wind in the pines, or that autumn scent of ripe fruit, or the thud of a cone dropping into the grass. And that is all that is wanted to create the feeling of an unrepeatable moment. We feel that these few sensations communicate to us the rhythm and the appealing uniqueness of things. Always with precise terms, and habitual adjectives; the poet does not wish any richness in the epithet to strike us or hold us up; the fulness of things seems here to be more fittingly rendered by a certain poverty of expression—an apparent poverty due to an accurate, severe selection of sensation, which will convey to us from the world of things that music, as it were, that links us with nature.

That is the first step in the transposition of truth into beauty.

But we must also describe the truth of the characters. The *dramatis personae* are genuine shepherds who think and express themselves like shepherds. Their way of speech is at once very unstudied and very traditional; they love to bring in scraps of traditional village wisdom, they often speak in proverbs. Their ways of thought are naturally encumbered by country superstitions—if you lie you'll get a pimple on your tongue or your nose; spit three times when you see your reflection in water to avoid the evil eye; if you see a wolf you lose the use of your tongue; and so on.

It would be worth while to follow them in their arguments too. They are slow-moving because they have the rhythm of country life—often about the good and bad points of their master, or about lost property which they accuse each other of having stolen. Or to follow their jokes, which are often tricks only worthy of children. One of them teaches his dog to bark, when he whistles, at the girl who rejects him; it is true that the girl had begun by pelting his sheep with apples.

There is another thing that gives the characters of these idylls the solidity of real people—they are all individualized. In modern times Daphnis, Corydon, Tityrus and Menalcas are simply a choice of interchangeable names for a single type, the abstract conception of the love-lorn swain, who has lost any individual character or personal savour. In the mimes of Theocritus the speakers are presented in pairs, and the individual differences of the contestants, however slightly delineated, help to form the dramatic interest—just as the warriors of the *Iliad* are all brave, but each in his own way. Let us look again at the two harvesters of *Idyll X*. Milo, the elder, is a bit of a grumbler, but a good farm-labourer who wants to do good work, and not worry his head about any silliness; a man of some experience, not likely to fall for romantic day-dreaming; a tart tongue, but with nothing corrosive in the irony; not entirely without an inner life, since he enjoys his fellow's musical voice—but to his mind a farm-labourer like him is better advised to think about his work than romantic stuff about girls. With him is a stripling, Bucaeus, who can think of nothing but love, and his girl, till he can't mow straight. Bucaeus is a sentimentalist and a dreamer—a dreamer who knows that these are dreams: he knows that the girl he loves is only fair in his eyes, and he says so. But for ten days he has lived on nothing but the charm of that feminine voice—the voice that tastes to him like a wild berry ('Nightshade thy voice . . .'), and on the memory of that sunburned skin. He would like to give his sweetheart the world, and he has nothing to give but his song, which ends in a sort of sigh over his inability to say why he loves her—

Thy ways, they are past my power to indite.[1]

Theocritus creates and contrasts characters with strokes that seem insignificant, touches so light as to be almost imperceptible.

Take another example—the two shepherds, Battus and Corydon, in *Idyll IV* ('The Shepherds'). The contrast between them is very marked, and on the other hand there is no bucolic contest; it is simply a conversation between shepherds out in the pastures, among cows that are not easy to keep together. They talk about the animals; they discuss their master. A few notes thrown in in passing give us the setting: dry hills with thorn-bushes, furze, tall thistles in the grass of the meadow, and below it the olive orchards sloping down to the sea.

Corydon is a simple nature, born kind-hearted without even realizing it. Even to his cows he attributes sensitive feelings: he is full of consideration for them, knows their favourite food and tries to find it for them. Everything, in his wretched slave's existence, he turns to sweetness; he loves the scent of the grasses as he enjoys the sound of his own flute. In a very humble station, he has sensibility; in a way he is a brother of Bucaeus—a brother of Theocritus too, no doubt.

Battus is the very opposite of this soul which confides in life. He is bitter and caustic, and sharp with his companion.

Critics have sometimes seen in this mime a kind of comedy in which Theocritus is laughing both at Corydon the 'good-hearted simpleton' and at Battus the 'sharp-tongued'. But to talk of comedy is to give the wrong idea of Theocritus, who is always in full sympathy with every character he creates, however rough and simple. Here in particular we find he has taken the trouble to put into the mouth of the unpleasant Battus a few rapid lines full of affection for a girl he loved once who is dead; an old wound which can explain the bitterness and unfriendliness of the man. He too had had a tender heart, and was more like Corydon than we first thought.

At the end of the mime, by an opposite movement, Corydon seems to draw closer to Battus; the two forget their differences to comment together on an escapade of their old master in extremely salacious terms. These two very different men are reconciled in a sort of current of rustic paganism which was flowing through the whole idyll without our realizing it.

Yet it would be wrong, by stressing these slight differences of character between the speakers, to make out that the mimes are miniature psychological dramas. Theocritus uses the differences for ends that are lyrical. The two contrasted personages are there to make as it were variations on the same theme: two personages of the same social rank, living in the same world of feelings—dominated by love and nature—are heard as two 'voices' combined in a single chord. So we should speak far less of drama and psychology than of music, or, to drop figures of speech, of lyricism: a lyricism in which the inner movement comes from the slight contrast and the poetic rivalry between the personages created by the poet.

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[1] *Ibid.*

As for the music for two voices of *Idyll IV*, it is that of two simple country-dwelling souls, busied with petty everyday tasks, and half submerged by all the inexorable claims of life in the fields. In one man this weight of daily cares has soured his humour, in the other everything has turned to—is the right word tenderness? But these opposite reactions are not very important; the two are a part of that rural life that bears them on with it—animals that run loose, meadows full of thistles, the girl who was loved and who died, the old man who still plays the satyr behind the cowshed, and whom in their simple way they admire for his vigour. And all this contains and, thanks to the art of Theocritus, communicates a fervent love of life.

◎

Two great presences, in this lyricism of his, lift into poetry the truth of his paintings of things and sentiments—love and nature, mingled one with the other.

Love appears everywhere in the idylls, and every sort of love. Sometimes Theocritus speaks in his own name; more often he uses spokesmen detached from himself, but fed by his experience of love, and shown as possessed and crushed by passion. So Daphnis in *Idyll I*.

This idyll, 'Thyrsis, or the song' seems at first to be a simple conversation between Thyrsis, poet and shepherd, and a goatherd who asks him to tell of 'the passion of Daphnis', the mythical patron of Sicilian shepherds, the swain dying of love. As the slow conversation unfolds, the scene is built up in which we shall hear the song of love, the song of the pining away and strange death of Daphnis. The setting is the lonely mountainside, the silence of noonday in which only the murmur of a pine is heard or the trickling of a stream—that 'Panic' silence the shepherd dare not break with his reedpipe, because

Pan takes his rest wearied with hunting: and he's choleric;
Around his nostrils bitter wrath sits lurking. . . .[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

35. *Epicurus, from 'A Catalogue of the Ancient Marbles at Ince Blundell Hall'. London British Museum*

3

Thyrsis sings. He tells of that passion of which Daphnis was the great victim, of which he died, and dying carried his secret with him. Daphnis loved and fled from love; passion filled him wholly, but for whom we do not know, nor even did he. Deliberately, Theocritus has left the outlines of the myth in a sort of chiaroscuro. Nature assists the shepherd in his pain, and puzzles vainly over its cause; and Daphnis dies, carrying his secret with him, refusing it to men, refusing it to beasts and gods who come to mourn his death. To us, readers, alone the poet entrusts it, as a vague undefined distress linked up with our mortal condition, at the same time as the poetry of his song leaves us released and bathed in glory.

This is what he sings.

Lead now, I pray, dear Muses, lead you the pastoral song.
For him the jackals howled, for him the wolves: the lion even
Came forth from the thicket to lament him when he died.
Lead now, I pray, dear Muses, lead you the pastoral song.
Many a cow and many a bull stood round him where he lay.
Many a heifer and young calf, lowing for misery.
Lead now, I pray, dear Muses, lead you the pastoral song.
First from the hills came Hermes, and said, 'Daphnis, my friend,
Who is it that is torturing thee? Whom so much does thou love?'
Lead now, I pray, dear Muses, lead you the pastoral song.
Came the herdsmen and the shepherds, and the goatherds came:
All of them asked what ailed him. Came Priapus too,
And said, 'Poor Daphnis, wherefore thus lie pining, while the maid
By every stream, through every grove is roaming up and down—
Lead now, I pray, dear Muses, lead you the pastoral song.
—Seeking thee? Ah thou feckless boy, in love thou art but a fool.
A herdsman wast thou called, but now thou are like a sorry goatherd.
When a goatherd looks upon his flock sporting in wanton play,
His eyes grow wistful for regret that he was not born a goat;—
Lead now, I pray, dear Muses, lead you the pastoral song.
So thou, when thou beholdest how gaily the girls laugh,
Thine eyes grow wistful, since thou does not join them in their dance.'
Yet to them all the herdsman answered naught, but still endured
His bitter love, aye, he endured it even to the fated end.
Lead yet awhile, ye Muses, lead you the pastoral song.

Aphrodite too comes with mockery and cruel laughter. She asks him if he thinks he has overcome Eros, as he used to boast. And this time Daphnis replies.

36. *Egyptian scene*

Then at length answering her taunts spoke Daphnis: 'Cruel Cypris,
Vindictive Cypris, Cypris by mortal men abhorred,
Doubtless already thou does deem my latest sun has set.
Nay, Daphnis even in Hades shall work Love bitter woe.

. . . . . .

O wolves, O jackals, O ye bears that sleep in mountain caves,
Farewell! The herdsman Daphnis you shall never meet with more,
Never in forest, glade or grove. Fare thee well, Arethusa,
And all you streams that down the vale of Thymbris flow so fair.

. . . . . .

Since Daphnis lies dying! Let the stag tear the hounds,
And screech-owls from the hills contend in song with nightingales.'
Break off, I pray, ye Muses, break off the pastoral song.
These words he spoke, then said no more: and him would Aphrodite
Fain have raised back to life; but no more thread for the Fates to spin
Was left him: down to the stream [of death] went Daphnis: eddying waves closed o'er
The man loved by the Muses, whom every Nymph held dear.
Break off, I pray, ye Muses, break off the pastoral song.[1]

Come, lord, and take this shapely pipe, fragrant with honeyed breath
From the sweet wax that joins it, curved to fit the lip so well.
As for me—down to Hades Love is haling me already.
Break off, I pray, ye Muses, break off the pastoral song.
Bear violets henceforth, ye brambles, and ye thistles too,
And upon boughs of juniper let fair narcissus bloom;
Let all things be confounded; let the pine-tree put forth figs,
Lead yet awhile, ye Muses, lead you the pastoral song.
O Pan, Pan, whether thou art on the high hills of Lykaios,
Or whether o'er great Mainalos thou roamest, hither come.

. . . . . .

So Thyrsis sings the death of Daphnis.

In Theocritus, the poetry of nature and love mingled offers the reader not, like earlier poetry, a way to live and die (heroically if need be), but an escape from life, an escape into the sweetness of oblivion. 'Poetry', writes the poet, 'is a cure for the serious dispositions of men; a sweetness, but one not easy to come by.' The word 'sweetness' runs like a golden thread from end to end of his work.

His poetry offers man, not now life and its struggles, but a dream which is a rest from life, a nostalgic love of life, a wonderful forgetfulness of life, a dream to take the place of life.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

A *nostalgic* dream. The particular form of his sensibility, and the circumstances in which he invented the bucolic genre, combined to give his creation one of its essential characteristics. Theocritus, as I have said, is writing for town-dwellers, hemmed in himself by a society that is tired and decrepit, a society of businessmen and public servants (for Alexandria was that, as is the world of today).

It is a mistake, and an elementary one, to assert that the *Thalysia*, because they recall the memory of a country walk in the isle of Cos, must have been written in Cos; or that the Sicilian idylls were composed in Sicily. The argument is literal-minded and misrepresents the tone—the nostalgic tone—of this poetry. On the contrary, it is possible to argue (and it has been done, with great cogency) that the rustic idylls, bathed in their atmosphere of ideal light, can only have been conceived, and therefore presumably written, from solitary exile in the vast metropolis, Alexandria. This nature-lover, doomed to the deadly tedium of city life after a childhood spent in the fields, had to be far from all he loved as he went over those early memories—had to use his imagination to reconstruct the landscapes of early years. In no other way could his love of nature have taken on the nostalgic note which is distinctive of his poetry. Theocritus is himself the image of a tired world, he is himself tired of a world where nothing counts but money. To it he brings the nostalgia of trees, fields and water, the longing for the simple life of shepherds. He brings the illusion—and sometimes more than the illusion—that he has found the Fountain of Youth, has discovered with sudden freshness the beauty of the natural world and the naïveté of love.

That is, I think, a modern view of poetry. Poetry is no longer a principle of life, it has passed life by, and gone beyond; it is an after-life, a paradise.

Theocritus has created the poets' paradise. We may say it all the more fittingly because, as I have said, the original sense of the Greek word is a great pasture set with trees where shepherds feed their flocks. In this paradise all shepherds are poets; they are poets naturally, because, in this free garden where they live, all is beauty. They have cast out all ugliness, all that could tarnish the purity of a fine day without end—rain, money troubles and the rest. But above all, their own vision of things transfigures all reality into beauty. So they sing; and the Muses come even to the dark coffer of vulgar reality that encloses them, to visit and feed them.

O fortunate Komatas, such joys indeed were thine! . . .

—But let me have the Greek text and the magic sound of the words in Greek! What does meaning matter, when it is the music of the words that charms?

ὦ μακάριστε Κομᾶτα, τύ θην τάδε τερπνὰ πεπόνθεις . . .

After that it is horrible to go back to the pale words that are supposed to translate it.

O fortunate Komatas, such joys indeed were thine;
Yea, prisoned in the coffer, by the bees thou wast fed
With honey-comb, and didst endure thy bondage a whole year.
Would that thou hadst been numbered with the living in my days,
That so I might have grazed thy pretty she-goats on the hills,
Listening to thy voice, whilst thou under the oaks or pines
Hadst lain, divine Komatas, singing sweet melodies.[1]

ἁδὺ μελισδόμενος κατεκέκλισο, θεῖε Κομᾶτα.

◆

Let us leave Theocritus. His incomparable language, cunningly and patiently made up of an exquisite medley of several Greek dialects, that language whose every vowel, whose every wide-opened diphthong, sings more sweetly than any music—his poetry defies and humbles us. Let us leave him to the perfection of his art.

Not however before trying to give some idea, however weak, of that glorious spectacle of summer on the wane, and harvest-time resplendent with ripening fruits, that crowns the poem of the *Thalysia*.

(The characters in the idyll have walked a long distance on the island of Cos, to celebrate in the house of a friend the Thalysia, a festival in honour of Demeter.)

With the pretty boy Amyntas, Eukritos and I
Turned to the farm of Phrasidemos; and arriving there
We soon were lying joyously couched upon soft deep beds
Heaped with scented rushes and vine-leaves newly stripped.
And high above our heads there swayed and quivered many a branch
Of poplar and of elm-tree, while close beside us welled
The sacred water gushing from the cavern of the Nymphs.
Amid the shadowing foliage the brown cicalas chirped
And chattered busily without pause; and far away was heard
From the dense bramble-thicket the tree-frog's fluted note.
Larks and thistle-finches sang, the turtle-dove was moaning:
About the running water hovered the tawny bees.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 27. The author's comment applies of course to his own French rendering (Translator).

All things breathed the scent of teeming summer and ripe fruits.
Pears at our feet lay fallen, and apples at our sides
Were rolling in abundance; and the plum-tree's tender boughs
Drooped overburdened with their load of damsons to the earth;
And mouths of jars, for four years sealed with resin, were unstopped.
Ye nymphs of Castaly, that haunt the steep Parnassian hill,
Did ever aged Cheiron in Pholos' rocky cave
Set before Herakles a bowl with such a vintage filled?
Did ever such a draught of nectar beguile that shepherd lout
Who dwelt beside Anapos, and pelted ships with crags,
Strong Polypheme, and set his feet capering about his folds?—
Such a draught as ye Nymphs that day made stream for us beside
Harvest Demeter's altar, upon whose mound of corn
May it be mine once more to plant the great fan, while she sits
And smiles upon us, holding sheaves and poppies in each hand.[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

OTHER ESCAPISMS: HERODAS AND REALISTIC MIME, THE NOVEL—*DAPHNIS AND CHLOE*

There is more than one form of escape. One possibility is to turn away from a literature which aimed at the greatness of man by showing him the paths of danger and glory trod by heroes, and deliberately to choose the path of human baseness, to denounce the sordid pettinesses, absurdities and vices of men of all walks of life, without even turning them to ridicule. This is the path of vulgar realism, the realism that gloats over the ugly and the distorted. It is the way chosen by the poet Herodas in his mimes, which attain beauty through their incredible ugliness. It was the same choice that was made by a very wide movement in Hellenistic sculpture.

This refusal to face human nature in its upward tendency, and the attendant dangers, does constitute a form of escape from literature as the classical Greeks had conceived it. To help man live in the world as it is, but live to stand up to it and change it—that was the primary object of their work. And to do that it had set out above all, up till now, to study man in his weakness (I am not here saying his baseness) and his thirst for greatness, to learn to measure him against this universe which is his natural setting, and thus, through knowledge of the laws of the world and those of his own heart, to give man the power to adjust himself more truly to reality.

But let us for a moment follow the way of Herodas, which I have called that of vulgar realism.

Of the man we know very little. We knew no more than his name up to the year 1889, when the British Museum acquired a Greek papyrus brought to light by a lucky excavation in Egypt, which contained nine of his mimes. The mime, as we have learnt already in speaking of Theocritus, was an old Sicilian genre which aimed to reproduce reality by means of familiar dialogues. In the past Plato, the great artist of dialogue, had delighted in it; and Aristotle classes the old Syracusan mimes in the same literary genre as the Socratic dialogues—by which I mean the authentic dialogues of Socrates with his disciples, not the imitations of these made by Plato and Xenophon.

Herodas renews the genre by writing his mimes in an odd metre, which could hardly be made uglier, known as *scazon*, or limping iambics. Indeed the end of the line gives a kind of lurch and seems to sink (into what kind of mud we do not like to ask).

We shall look at a few of these works. Take first 'The Bawd'.

A young wife, Metriche, is alone with her servant, while her husband is away in Egypt. Someone knocks at the door—Metriche's old nurse; she has come on a visit, and apologizes for not having been near her for five months—but Metriche lives so far away! '. . . The mud in the lanes reaches up to my knees, and my strength is as a fly's.'[1] After a few preliminaries, she comes to the point—the husband in Egypt, who has forgotten his wife in a country full of temptations.

> *It's five months since Mandris set sail to Egypt, and not a line has he sent you. He has forgotten you and drunk of a new cup. Egypt is the very home of the goddess; for all that exists and is produced in the world is in Egypt: wealth, wrestling grounds, might, peace, renown, shows, philosophers, money, young men, the domain of the Θεοὶ ἀδελφοί, the king a good one, the museum, wine, all good things one can desire, women more in number—I swear by Kore wife of Hades—than the sky boasts of stars. . . . Why, then, do you sit idle here?*[2]

We notice this praise of Egypt with the list of the wonders it contains, and a word of eulogy for the king adroitly worked in; also the rather amusing mixture of things which certainly would keep a husband away from home—wine, shows, women—with others, like the Museum, the philosophers and the royal splendours, which would probably allure him less.

At this, after asking whether there is any danger of being overheard, the old woman comes to the delicate part of her mission. There is a handsome young man, Gryllos, who has been dying for love of Metriche ever since he saw her in some procession; and he is plaguing her day and night. He is the finest-looking of men, an athlete crowned at the games, and as rich as he is beautiful and strong. Metriche would be wise to forget her principles, just for once; the happiness that awaits her is greater than anything she can imagine. . . . In spite of all this eloquence Metriche refuses. Her answer is highly edifying—she is an honest woman and desires to remain faithful to her husband. At the same time she is not indignant; she is no prude. She calls the servant to bring the old woman a drink, a wine-cup is wiped out, and the nurse declares she never tasted anything better.

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[1] *The Mimes and Fragments*, with notes by Walter Headlam, edited by A. D. Knox, Cambridge University Press, 1922, p. 3.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

We come next to a less virtuous figure in the mime entitled 'The Jealous Woman'. Bitinna is a matron who has taken one of her slaves as a lover; but she suspects him of playing her false and accuses him furiously in the crudest of terms. The poor wretch defends himself as best he can.

> *Every day excuses and excuses!*
>
> *—Bitinna, I am your slave; do what you will with me, and don't suck my blood every day and every night.*[1]

She takes him at his word, has him tied up to a stake, and gives orders for the cords to be strained tight. He pleads for mercy, promising not to do it again; but this confession maddens her. She tells the others to take him off to the house of correction, where special appliances were to be found for disciplining the slaves, and to put him down for a thousand lashes on the back and as many on the belly. The unfortunate takes this for a death sentence—but no sooner has he gone than she thinks better of it. If we are to believe what she says, she has thought of something worse for him—branding with the hot iron; but we wonder if her anger is not already on the ebb. A slave-girl who guesses her real feelings takes it upon her to beg the culprit off, on the pretext that it is a festival day. Bitinna allows herself to be persuaded, while still putting up the pretence that she has not weakened. 'After the festival', she tells her lover, calling him back, 'you shall have your festival.' With this threat the mime ends, but we do not take it seriously; we know that the jealous fit is over.

The mime is less than a hundred lines long, and extremely animated. The characters are coarse and vulgar, but what a change after the 'refined' manners of Jason with Hypsipyle!

Another mime, with a less indelicate subject, is hardly less brutal; it is 'The Schoolmaster'. The scene is a classroom: enter a mother, Metrotime. Her husband is an elderly fellow who cannot control their boy; they are humble folk, living in one of the multi-storey tenements that were beginning to go up in Alexandria. The urchin goes to primary school, or rather, he fails to go: he plays truant and goes off to gamble for coppers with the street-porters. So the mother, at her wits' end, has dragged him along to school, and requests the master to take the skin off his back. He does so, after making three of the big boys take hold of him and keep him still —a painting in Herculaneum serves to illustrate the scene: in it we see a schoolboy on the back of one of his fellows, while another holds his feet. Then Herodas' schoolmaster lays on with his ox-tail whip, with no attention to the boy's cries and appeals. In vain does the poor mite beg for mercy, and appeal to the kind Muses whose pictures preside over the classroom; his punishment does not stop until his skin is as mottled as a snake's. If ever he does it again, he will have his feet tied together and be made to hop round the schoolroom under the eyes of the goddesses whom now he detests. Even with all this the mother is not really satisfied. 'No,' she calls out to the master whose arms are tiring, 'don't stop yet, flay him till the sun goes down.'

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 221.

That touch would seem exaggerated, were it not that she has painted her own character at the beginning of the mime in a torrent of scolding that lasts fifty lines. She complains of the lad's idleness and ingratitude, with a profusion of detail typical of a woman of the people when she sees red. We are spending any amount of money for him to be educated, she says, and here he doesn't know his letters yet; he can't recite his poem—his grannie who can't read knows it better than he does. It would be far better to send him to keep donkeys. The other day, what should he do but climb on to the roof; and everyone could hear him breaking the tiles like biscuits—and—

> *When the winter is near I pay three* hemaetha *for each tile with tears in my eyes. For all the tenement cries with one voice: 'It is Kottalos Metrotime's boy who did this' —and it is true enough, so that I am not left with enough to wag a tooth on.*[1]

Fifty lines all on this note—a masterpiece of maternal recrimination.

But here is the mime which, in its vulgarity, is the best that Herodas has written. It is 'The Pander'. The hero is a brothel-keeper named Battaros, who lives in Cos as a resident alien. A youth, Thales, has come by night, broken into his place, given the owner a good beating and stolen one of the inmates. The scene takes place in the law-courts: what Herodas gives is the plea of Battaros, the honourable plaintiff.

His speech is admirable for its imperturbable gravity and dignity. It is composed in the noblest style of the masters of Attic oratory. The speaker expatiates on the traditional themes which we find in the civil pleadings of Lysias and Demosthenes; while every so often the real nature comes through, and he brings out expressions and reflections which reveal his trade. The contrast between the majesty of the thought and the calling of the character provides the comedy.

One of the commonplaces of Athenian oratory was the contrast between rich and poor; it never failed to make an impression on a tribunal drawn from the people. Battaros does not forget it.

> *Just because he sails the sea or has a cloak worth three Attic minae, while I live on*

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 113.

shore wearing a thin coat and trodden-down sandals—if for these reasons he intends to take away one of my girls by force, without my consent, at night, of all times, why, then, the safety of the city is ruined, and your chief pride, your autonomy, will be undone by Thales.[1]

This is what advocates call broadening the issue, with a vengeance.

Thereupon the old man cites a law against assault and battery passed by a certain Charondas. He has it read out by the clerk, not forgetting to stop the clepsydra which is measuring the time of his speech. Then, in the middle of the reading, he is seized with enthusiasm for this law, which awards him heavy damages, and breaks in—

So wrote Charondas, gentlemen, not Battaros desirous of prosecuting Thales. And 'should a man batter a door let him be fined a mina; should he thrash a man with his fists, let him be fined another mina; should he burn the house or trespass the assessment is fixed at one thousand drachmae and for any damage let him be fined twice over'. For Charondas was settling a city, Thales, but you know not of a city nor how a city is governed.[2]

He lectures the young man in the exalted tones of a citizen deeply conscious of the respect due to the laws.

Later, in an emotional passage such as speakers frequently used, he calls on the victim, Myrtale, the girl from his establishment, puts her in the box and adjures her with paternal solicitude.

Come here, Myrtale—it's your turn. Show yourself to all; don't be ashamed. Consider that those whom you see trying the case are your fathers and brethren. Look, gentlemen, up and down, at her rents, how threadbare these were rent by this villain, when he mauled and tousled her. . . .[3]

Near the end he invokes Old Age in a magnificent personification, because age had prevented him from laying Thales out.

Age, let him thank you, since else he would have spat forth his blood, like Philippus the Locust of old in Samos. [*This alludes to some boxing incident to which we have lost the clue.*] *Do you laugh at me? Yes, I am a low fellow—I don't deny it—and Battaros is my name, and my grandfather Sisymbras and my father Sisymbriskos, and they were bawds all of them.*[4]

A noble effusion indeed, of filial and professional pride!

His peroration, equally elevated, identifies the plaintiff's cause with the cause of all strangers domiciled in Cos, and ultimately with the honour of the city itself, as upheld by its divine ancestors in legend.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 63–5. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*, p. 67. [4] *Ibid.*

Gentlemen, think not that you cast your vote for Battaros the bawd, but for all the foreigners who live in the city. Now is the hour when you will prove the might of Cos and Merops, and the glory of Thessalos and Herakles, and the cause of Asklepios' coming hither from Tricca, and the reason wherefore Phoebe bare Leto on this spot.[1]

Such a pleading would be equally worthy to figure among the works of Isocrates —or Courteline.[2]

◎

No doubt it is time to sum up on Herodas: and this time I should like to sum up, not in the language of a critic or historian of literature, but in terms of life. This will, I know, appear to be empty verbiage; but I will try to explain.

One observation seems to me incontestable: the poetry of Herodas, in its essence, is utterly foreign to all that has come to our notice so far in this study of Greek poetry, literature and life. From one end of its evolution to the other, including Euripides, including Aristophanes, from Homer to the *Bacchae* and Archimedes, Greek literature had been above all else a Logos—a Word, existing to be heard, existing to be lived; or at least that was a highly important mode of its existence. But there is no Word in Herodas trying to make itself heard; only a literature delighting in imitation of the real, and of a gross kind of reality. From this source there have since come, no doubt, great pieces of writing. But shall we never see again the great tree that fed and sheltered the peoples of antiquity?

Men have 'escaped' from under its shadow.

◎

But now, soon after the beginning of the Christian era, another form of escapism appears—the Greek novel. Was ever a genre of literature closer to simple recreation, pastime, sport?

It has been said of it that it was born old. In any case it was born of a literature a thousand years old, exhausted with the ceaseless bringing to life of new genres and new masterpieces.

Long ago its glorious elders, epic, lyric and drama, had run their course. Oratory had degenerated into rhetoric, history into romanced biography or suspect erudition. The last of the poets were versifying geography, medicine and natural history, or polishing up epigrams. In those twilight ages, only philosophy threw out a few vivid gleams. And then, as if ancient Greece could not settle herself to rest before bequeathing to the modern world the most modern genre in literature, she invented the novel.

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 67–9.

[2] A humorous novelist and playwright (1860–1929) specializing in themes of barrack life and officialdom.

Its flowering was sudden and prolific, and came about the second century A.D. (though the *Pastorals* of Longus, also known as *Daphnis and Chloe*, are still later, belonging perhaps to the fifth century. Of the author we know nothing).

Borrowing its subjects from Alexandrian erotic poetry, its settings from the semi-fabulous relations of explorers, its tone—unfortunately—from the sophistry of the times, which had become adept at working out questions of love by the rules of a vulgar geometry of sentiment, Greek romance is made of bits and pieces, and the works are nearly always very mediocre.

The basic plot is unoriginal—always a story of love thwarted by circumstance, and mixed up with adventures. Two young creatures are in love with each other—always miraculously beautiful, chaste, faithful, kept apart by the wills of their parents, dogged by jealous rivals and foul villains. Fortune reigns supreme over the plot (what has become of the gods?), and rains down misadventures on their path; until in the end Love and Virtue rise triumphant over every trial and obtain their reward. Unkind Fortune turns sympathetic, unites the lovers, and punishes the wicked—unless they reform; these stories are full of brigands with hearts of gold. All ends in the happiest and most edifying way—sometimes with a slow kiss in close-up.

On top of all this we find a vast stock-in-trade of absurdly contrived situations. Foundlings, in large numbers, turn out in due time to be the children of rich and well-born parents. Sweethearts who have been abandoned, cast into the deep, or buried alive, never fail to turn up again at the dénouement. Wicked kings, wily enchanters, pirates, all abound. Imperious matrons fall unseasonably in love with the handsome hero. Old retainers are so devoted that they swim behind the ship carrying off their master. Not to mention the mass-produced dreams and oracles that turn up each time the characters—and their author—need to be helped out of a scrape.

Lastly, the exotic setting. The novelist works up this part of his subject conscientiously. He has read the relations of the Marseilles navigators who have explored the northern seas and the mouths of the Senegal. He knows the chronicles of the East which, since Alexander's expedition, have been stuffed with picturesque lore from Persia, magic from Babylon, supernatural phenomena from India. He has run through works on botany and zoology, and the lists of 'rarities' drawn up by the Alexandrian savants; he has not ignored those philosophical works which were picking unknown lands as the site of their utopias or communities of noble savages. With all this documentation he can send his pairs of lovers careering wildly all over the surface of the earth, and daub in settings of dubious local colour. Bogus Babylonian vies with pasteboard Egyptian; Ethiopia, surprisingly governed by an enlightened monarch assisted by fakirs, is full of fine sentiments; while beyond the mists of Thule—which, as I have said, is our Norway—flourish enchantresses, and also neo-Pythagoreans.

This rage for travel, which carries the lovers sometimes as far as the lunar regions, spares the author the trouble of prospecting the labyrinths of the human mind. Heroes are always beautiful, always passionate, faithful heart and soul; and from any one romance to the next they might be carbon copies. Geographical space replaces psychological depth, and the vicissitudes of their lives dispense them from any wavering in their affections.

Thank Heaven, the great majority of this romantic stuff has failed to survive a further voyage—the hazardous journey all Greek literature has had to make before reaching our modern age. But we have received *Daphnis and Chloe*.

◎

This work is not without its failings: it has recourse to some of the facile devices that spoil the Greek novel as a whole. We have the usual convenient dreams, infants exposed to die with trappings of purple and gold that hold promise of some illustrious parentage, rivals and corsairs arriving pat to keep their appointments with destiny; the virtuous lovers are rewarded, the wicked are foiled and repent. Fortune has only shuffled the cards in order to sort them out triumphantly, with kindly clumsy hands whose shifts are only too clear.

Put it back in the literary climate from which it sprang, and the romance of Longus shows all its artificiality. But this is just the pitfall into which so many scholars fall—they are so busy explaining a work by the laws of the genre that produced it, that they forget to enjoy it. And yet it may happen that a second-rate genre will attract an author of talent; he will make use of all the fashionable devices, but within reason, making them subserve the expression of the dream within him. The same strings may still go on moving the same kind of puppets: but the activity which had bored us may begin to attract. If so the only thing that matters is that the level of our pleasure has risen, and we are carried away.

Scholars are not best pleased when a work refuses to be accounted for by its history: they dislike *Daphnis and Chloe* and not seldom insult it. 'Unwholesome and false', one of them has called it. Whereas Goethe, who consulted only his own reactions of pleasure, prized it highly, seeing in it, so Eckermann tells us, a masterpiece of intelligence, art and taste, and considering that it outdid old Virgil to some degree. But what right has the poet of *Hermann und Dorothea* to an opinion? Greek scholars reject him as incompetent. The learned historian of the Greek novel, Rohde, imagines he has explained Goethe's 'error of judgment' when he says—more amusingly than he realizes—'The false naïveté that the author puts into his story is not unskilfully copied from the true.' So, for art to copy nature is falsehood?

◎

That charming Lesbos countryside, how charmingly copied from the real one!—I do not mean the Lesbos of geography; and it matters little to me whether the author ever passed that way or not. (There is one passage where he is ten kilometres out on a total distance of sixty!) I mean the Lesbos that Longus carried in his mind, that vision of grassy ease that haunts the townsman, that holiday landscape, that isle of music and light where happiness is clear-cut against the green of fields and the blue of sky and water.

Daphnis and Chloe did not wander over the length and breadth of the world like other heroes of Greek romance; no eastern itinerary for them, no arctic log-book. They were two children whose furthest journey was to bring the goat down from some steep crag or chase excited he-goats when they started to butt one another. No search for the picturesque, whether exotic or provincial—just the eternal countryside, only recognizably Greek, if at all, by the hardness of line and the presence of the sea. The little garden in front of the farmhouse with its beds of roses and carnations, the orchard and its rows of apples and pears, olives and fig-trees; the hills where the flocks wander; the spring that gushes out of the thicket of thorn-bushes and junipers; and the meadow sloping towards the sea, busy with the to and fro of fishing-boats.

An idealized landscape; but not abstract, like a *jardin à la française* (*pace* Rohde)—very concrete, planted with various kinds of trees, plane and pine, cypress and laurel, inhabited by numbers of animals, hares that bound among the vines, thrushes and ring-doves on the wing, insects humming.

All Greek poetry gives its own view of nature, both real and ideal. Here we have not the nature of Aristophanes, packed with bright lights, sounds and smells, where the earth is dug with flashing spades, the village smells of dung, rosemary and new wine, breasts of women are bared in the fields to the wind of their running, while the hedges squawk with birds and the sun-drunk cicada shrills. Nor is it the rough, niggardly nature of Hesiod, too true a peasant to love anything in his patch of ground except the gain with which it rewards his sweat. Nor the hard serene nature of Homer, unmoved by the sufferings of unhappy mortals, deaf to their prayers, drawing man into her enchantments only to have him more at her mercy.

Instead, in the *Pastorals* of Longus, we have a nature peaceful, clement and mild, abounding in favours, proportioned to man and his illusions, kind to his griefs and smiling at his pleasure.

It is a nature we have all dreamed of, made up of joy and forgetting, with nothing for her sons but caresses—cool caresses to lull weariness and soothe sorrow and grief, keen caresses to sting sluggish flesh and school it to pleasure. The simple pleasures of young people living observantly in the fair garden of earth, watching their beasts together, sharing meals and sensing the approach of love; picking flowers together and weaving garlands for the nymphs; playing the plaintive reed-pipes which teach the lips to say what the heart has not yet learnt. Then the merry wine-harvest, with the girls pouring drink for the lads as they tread the grape, and the must drawn off by torchlight; and the last apple forgotten at the very top of the tree, fetched down by the peasant boy for his sweetheart, who is cross because he will climb for it and then thrilled because he has; and the winter snow that separates the country lovers, only to unite them more cosily in a room where they can repay the kisses stolen among the bushes. . . .

Nature as the accomplice of budding love.

◎

Sweet love-story of Daphnis and Chloe, how gracefully modelled on that memory of our first loves that we cherish within us! The girl bathes the boy's brown back and cannot refrain from touching and touching again; the boy's wondering eyes notice for the first time that the girl's hair is golden; kisses are offered in play, sweet kisses with a poisoned sting; love learning to know itself in laughter and tears, vanished sleep and beating heart, a world turned to drabness and the sudden magic of a face, the unimagined freshness of a glance—all the charming, fumbling apprenticeship of pleasure and tenderness. . . .

But take care, reader, this book is 'licentious', so say the philologists, almost to a man. It is of dubious taste and morals, pronounce the learned; its success in modern times is nothing to its credit, adds the austere scholar. So you know what to think of yourself, reader, if you like it.

Such was not the verdict of the worthy Bishop of Auxerre, Jacques Amyot, a man punctilious in his duties as prelate and preceptor of the royal princes, who was the first to translate—with what loving care!—this novel of Longus into French.

A work of sensuality of course: how can one write otherwise if one sets out to write of love? But is there any need to speak of *licentiousness*, that is (here I am prudent enough to consult the dictionary) moral laxity? Is there any need to refer, as critics have done, to the profligacy of Boucher's times, because Daphnis drops the apple he has picked into his sweetheart's bosom and earns a kiss for it, or hunts for a chirping cicada that has alighted there? Old Longus writes simply of these ingenuous endearments as 'sports of shepherd children'. And our great Renaissance scholars, whose principles, as well as their instincts, were presumably no weaker than our own, did not think decency offended in this story of two children, in love without quite knowing what love means, who set out to discover the secret that will bring them close together.

One thing we must add however is, that this gradual discovery of love by Daphnis and Chloe is just a little plodding, a little too conscientious—touchingly so no doubt, but now and then forcing us to smile. From the old shepherd Philetas, who is the wise man of the region, they have obtained what we should call today a lesson in sex education. In slightly veiled terms, as is only right. They work over their notes and do their exercises with good will which, though a trifle pedantic, is not implausible in its clumsiness. They are still very innocent after all, these country children, and they have not found out quite everything from watching the rams and ewes. Their confusion of mind as together they come to the knowledge of love, their shame at their ignorance, their constraint as they divine—are such sentiments so uncommon? Boldly and innocently they do their best to follow the old man's instructions and apply the only known remedy for the sickness of love, which is *coucher ensemble nue à nu*, as Amyot puts it, faithfully and naturally. But at last, how blissfully content on their wedding-night, as they lie and embrace to their heart's content—'for all the sleep they got that night', we are told, 'they might as well have been owls'.[1] It is not dead, it survives in this book, the old pagan naturalism that flows so potently through the literature of Greece. Nor is it perverted: attenuated a little, perhaps, but mingled, too, with exquisite new sweetness. The pungent tang of the flesh poetry had in the classical age, now half-evaporated, has only a pleasant headiness. The flesh is less spontaneous, more tutored, but also less tortured and more attuned to the aspirations of the heart. Love has ceased to be the tornado that tore man from his roots and swept him into the chill of death in Sappho and Euripides; now, it consists of a fine day slowly spent, a lifetime shared with the maid one has chosen because she is fair, or the lad whose presence is more desirable than all else in life. Fair she is and gentle, your Chloe, Daphnis, like the milk she mixed with wine for you to drink in the same cup, or the song of the flute that touched your lips after hers. And he is gracious and comely, your Daphnis, Chloe, beyond the beauty of flowers or the song of the stream. Were you but the pet kid that he fondles in his arms! . . . So does the sweetness of love mingle with the pleasure of the world.

◆

Now even the gods remember to be merciful and practise kindness! Already their faces have lost that radiance unbearable to mortal eyes, that seemed to reflect the blazing thunderbolt. The shades are climbing up the steep slopes of Olympus; already the foremost of the Immortals, who have no mention in these pages of Longus, dip towards the horizon like fallen suns. The old world has turned on its axis, and its outworn face is presented to some new dawn elsewhere.

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[1] *Daphnis and Chloe*, translated by Paul Turner, Penguin Classics, 1956, p. 121.

Yet in the countryside of Lesbos there still live for a space deities of very humble rank, but the oldest of all, those of the pool and tree—the last to leave the waning feast. In the hollow of the rock, where Chloe was suckled on the milk of goats, the Nymphs have their abode; barefoot, hair unbound, and smiling, they love to dance around the fountain; and on the walls of their grots the shepherds hang milking-pails and reed-pipes. The young goatherd never forgets to bring them their daily blossom or fruit. They delight in these gifts, and lavish favours in return. There are also the Nymphs of the fruit-trees and the wild wood. There is old Pan, who sits in the shade of the pine, cloven-hooved, horned, playing with the beasts his brothers. The peasant, when he flays his best goat, hangs the pelt with the horns on the tree where he lives. Friendly, fond of a jest, Pan will assist the country folk by suddenly lighting a fire or by causing the sound of trailing oars to be heard on the sea. The first creator of wine is not forgotten either in the village festivities, the god Dionysus. Nor the prancing band of the Satyrs; nor the Maenads, whose fawn-skin hangs from Chloe's shoulders.

Who was the critic who said that these divinities of the *Pastorals* were nothing but machinery for the plot or embellishments of the style? In reality there could be nothing less artificial than these rustic shapes of popular belief. Village gods, country gods—*di pagani*—the pact that binds them to orchard and farmstead is not yet broken.

At a time when Apollo and Zeus, Cypris and Artemis are coming to mean no more to a poet than costumes, properties and backcloths, the last of the pagan gods are still alive in the novel of Longus, still not dislodged from the simple heart of the countryside. They still distribute the elemental gifts, water and wine, milk and the fruits of the earth, watch over fields and flocks, guard over young love. More familiar than of old, and more condescending than were ever the Lords of Olympus, they extend a hand to lowly working folk, and smile.

Now that they, too, are about to fade away for ever, retreating into the depths of the woods, brought down to the humble guise of fairies or goblins, they seem to be looking at man in this, the last work where their living presence is felt, appealing for a friendly glance, and asking pardon that they have to die.

◎

But why did I speak just now of escapism? The Greek novel surely aims no higher than to entertain; is it so blameworthy for that? I can no longer decide; once more the book has won me over.

Perhaps, too, in these last pages, I have given way to the pleasure of saying a last farewell to the poetry of the Greeks.

Let the reader go and see for himself. But if he chooses for the purpose, as he probably will, the translation by Amyot retouched with admirable discretion by Paul-Louis Courier,[1] he must not forget that the book he has in his hands is a *French* work—and so successful that if, after reading it, one goes back to the Greek original, it is not Amyot but Longus who seems the translator, and a poor and clumsy one at that.

[1] Unfortunately we have no comparable Renaissance translation in English (Translator).

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

EPICURUS AND THE SALVATION OF MAN

> . . . *Because it is matter* par excellence; *and what could be worthier of mind than the veneration of matter? Whereas mind venerating mind—can you imagine it?*
> *Only too well.*
>
> Francis Ponge, *La Terre*

It is time to stop and sum up—or, if 'sum up' is too ambitious, at least take our bearings. The author, even if he does not always follow the accepted methods of history, is well aware of one fact: that history reaches no conclusions, it continues.

He can claim that, throughout the length of this last volume, he has never ceased to show glimpses of the future, even in the midst of a decline which was at times unattractive, though also full of promise. And now, in taking leave of this long-past era over which he has spent so much of his own life, he would like to choose a man worthy to represent that precious past and at the same time to be a companion on our road in the present age.

He has chosen Epicurus—Epicurus, whose one desire was to be a *friend* to the men of his time. May he also be ours!

◎

Epicurus lived roughly a century after Plato, at the very end of the fourth and in the first third of the third century B.C. His thought and his life—that of a sick man—make a rejoinder at once austere, suffering and serene to the high-flying dreams of Platonic idealism.

We have preserved the whole of Plato's work, a vast one, as all know. The still vaster work of Epicurus (whose books numbered some three hundred) is reduced today to three important letters written to friends, eighty aphorisms known as the 'Principal Doctrines', and a few dozen fragments preserved by quotation. The reasons for this massive liquidation are presumably the same as those for the destruction of the work of his master Democritus. But both these liberators of men found a defender in the great Latin poet Lucretius, who, with little or no distortion of their thought, obtained full justice for them, especially for Epicurus.

Few men and few doctrines have excited more opposing passions and judgments among contemporaries or in later times, than Epicurus and his teaching. Some consider him a diabolical being, the creator of the most abject form of materialism—based on the belly—who taught man to scorn the gods and bequeathed to the world a 'school for swine'. The term 'epicure', and even more the French *épicurien,* are not flattering descriptions, implying sensuality, if not debauchery. Whereas for others, Epicurus is all but a god—he has freed men from empty fears and ancestral superstitions and given them a life of peace; he is a physician, a liberator from that incurable pain which is only the incurable—or rather, the entirely curable—folly of man.

Lucretius, in his style of 'lofty passion', declares:

> *A god was he, a god, . . . who first found out the way of life now called Wisdom, and saved our human life through his skill from such storms and such darkness, to establish it in such calm, in such clear light.*

I will try to show him simply, as he was; and first of all, as I trace the course of his life, I will set him briefly against the world he lived in.

Few times have been more tragic than his. Epicurus was an Athenian citizen and spent the greater part of his life in Athens. He was born in Samos, the son of an Athenian colonist, a schoolmaster, in 341. At fourteen, his father sent him to Teos to follow the lessons of a disciple of Democritus who, by a picture of the universe based frankly on an atomic theory, taught 'freedom from fear' and thereby showed his pupils a way to happiness.

After the death of Alexander in 323, Epicurus lived for several years in exile and poverty; and in that hard school, while still a youth, discovered almost by himself the secret of that happiness he had the privilege of practising in his life and attempted to hand on to others. Later he rejoined his father; but he had acquired the habit of living alone, arming himself by reflection for the struggles of life, determined to achieve the conquest of wisdom. At nineteen he was mature.

He was also ill. Though possessed of the keenest and most vulnerable sensibility, as his letters attest, he was already armoured against pain by the presence in his body of a stomach and bladder disorder for which the science of his time knew no cure. He made up his mind then to live with it and come to terms with it, since he could not get rid of it. But what if he did have vomiting fits twice a day? He knew that like all men he was made for happiness; and by willing it, he attained it. This discovery of how simple happiness is, he refused to keep for himself alone: he passed it on to the men he met, taught them to experience it as he had, and they became his friends. Slowly, he shaped his doctrine: twelve years of solitary meditation, with his cruel bladder-trouble, twelve years of frugal living, and he began to teach. He had long experience of suffering and hardship, but also he had the deep settled joy of being loved by his friends and loving them, and of being a man whose life was lived in truth. With this he built up his ethic—with his experience of joy wrested from the day-to-day pain of his body.

In the spring of 306, at thirty-five, Epicurus settled in Athens. Here was the brilliant world-centre of thought; Athens was still the city of Plato and Aristotle, and from it alone could any new movement of thought spread widely. It became the home of the new wisdom of the Hellenistic age; soon after, Zeno came here to found the Stoa, or 'Porch', in 301; in 306 Epicurus, with the help of friends, bought the 'Garden', a modest flower garden, in which he taught till the day of his death—the day when in all sincerity, examining his life and drawing a line before casting up the total, he wrote:

> *On this truly happy day of my life, as I am at the point of death, I write this to you. The diseases in my bladder and stomach are pursuing their course, lacking nothing of their natural severity: but against all this is the joy in my heart at the recollection of my conversations with you. Do you, as I might expect from your devotion from boyhood to me and to philosophy, take good care of the children of Metrodorus.*[1]

That was his last request. The short note was dictated by him in his last lucid moments, for his best friends who were absent. The master desired—and his last will stresses the same thing—that after his death they should go on showing the poor and humble the same kindness he had always showed them. The will also gave freedom to his old servant, his lifelong companion Mys (the name means 'mouse'), and three other slaves, including a woman. He also asked them to take care of Nicanor

> *. . . as I have done, to show that those who have studied with me and have met my needs from their own resources and shown me every mark of friendship and elected to grow old with me in the study of philosophy, may not lack for anything that is necessary, as far as lies in my power.*[2]

Lastly, in his desire to spread joy, especially communal joy, he ordered that annual offerings should continue to be made to the dead, that birthdays which were causes for rejoicing should still be celebrated, as well as the banquet on the twentieth of each month celebrating the memory of his friend Metrodorus, already dead, and he asked that to this celebration should be added a commemoration of himself. These requests in no way imply a belief in the immortality of his soul or of those of the dead in general (as Cicero wrongly thought). Far from it, Epicurus only wanted the atmosphere of joy which while living he had succeeded in creating in the group of faithful followers not to be dispersed by his absence after death. He thought there could be no higher joy than for friends to meet and celebrate in unity the memory of a good master.

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[1] *Epicurus. The Extant Remains*, translated by Cyril Bailey, Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1926, p. 127.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 155.

It is clear to see that the life of Epicurus the accursed was very like the life of a saint.

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But he was a saint living in one of the gloomiest times that the ancient world had to traverse, a time full of signs of the decline of the Hellenistic age.

Here are a few facts concerning this moment of time he witnessed. Athens from 307 to 261, had forty-six years of wars and risings—wars which obliterated even that sense of common Hellenic ties which had long subsisted between Greeks. Greeks were no more taken prisoner, women no longer respected—nothing but the sword, rape and slavery. In the public life of the cities, the parties or what remained of them fought for a semblance of power. Four times, in Athens, the foreigner intervened, occupied the city, and modified a phantom constitution which was never put in force. Three times there were insurrections. Four times the city stood a siege. Blood, fire, slaughter, pillage—such was the moment of Epicurus.

Poverty was increasing and spreading as early as the time of Plato. There is a sentence in the *Republic* that shows how far the evil had spread already, and shows that Plato was not blind to it. He is speaking of a kind of people who seem to belong to no class of citizens, who are 'neither merchants nor soldiers nor anything at all, except paupers'. We know these people—they are the unemployed, the proletariat; worse still, they are humans condemned to poverty once for all, *never* to emerge, *never* to rise up again.

Here I return for the last time to that flaw in ancient society which has already been pointed out—slavery. The free citizen's labour proved unable to withstand the competition of slave labour—as anyone could have foreseen, though no one did. So, for both, there was one fate, misery.

There are a few indications to suggest that Athens, in the time of her greatness, may have felt strong enough for some men to conceive the idea of abolishing slavery. They are only slight hints; echoes reach us through Euripides. But when Philip of Macedonia enslaved Greece, he introduced a clause into the peace agreement he imposed, forbidding for ever the enfranchisement of slaves. This clause confirmed the downfall of the Greeks, for it closed the sole remaining escape towards the birth of a sounder society.

After that slavery could only multiply and spread. With the industrial and commercial development that followed the campaigns of Alexander, the numbers and proportional strength of slaves increased. On the other hand, the concentration of wealth in fewer hands—wealth still based on land, on agriculture—meant the ruin of the small landowner. Two poles formed in ancient society, one constituted by landowners, very rich but in steadily declining numbers, the other, by slaves whose numbers incessantly grew, drawing towards themselves and into destitution that part of the free population which was already poor, but which was moving towards 'misery' in the strictest sense. Slavery went on making headway, and began to produce its disastrous consequences. The number of slaves in ancient society grew steadily until the time of Christ, which was the peak.

An ancient writer relates that in the fourth century B.C., a citizen of Phocaea for the first time brought a thousand slaves into his country: the result was a general insurrection of the people, which was still only poor, but saw the prospect of total destitution. The intrusion of those slaves meant deprivation of work and bread for an equal number of free workmen, each of them maintaining a family of perhaps four or five dependants.

Thus the coexistence of slavery with free labour was the direst calamity for the worker in the ancient world. It eliminated any possibility of organization or resistance by labour, and left it hopelessly subject to the unchecked power of capital. Slave labour, used in the Hellenistic world on a hitherto unknown scale, brought about the mass ruin of the small producer; and with it the fall and disappearance of the labouring population.

At Athens, in this painful end of the fourth century, the State organized doles of food and wages to poor citizens for a time. But it was too poor itself to keep up the effort very long, nor would it have been of much use. The doles were soon abolished. It also sometimes had to suspend payment of its own officials' salaries. In the end Athens exported her unemployed, as if to avoid hearing their complaints; what happened then was that these forced emigrants could find nothing better to do than enlist in the armed bands that were roaming the Hellenistic world, and looting at random.

In that world of disintegrating economy, life became so uncertain that it seemed an affair of pure chance. So much so that a new divinity and a new cult appeared—that of the invented goddess Tychè, whose name signifies 'Luck'. This cult spread widely; men, the same men who earlier had been looking to science to formulate stable laws for nature and society, came to look on the world and the human lot as governed by chance alone, so insecure was their life. This was another of the things that stimulated the effort of Epicurus.

At the same time it must be added that slavery, though ever-increasing and expected to satisfy all needs, remained quite inadequate from the point of view of production. The slave seemed unable to help the economy to progress—as if by his nature! Antiquity speaks with one voice, from Plato to Columella, through the writings of Xenophon, Cato and Varro, a voice that is unanimous though it was never heeded—giving warning that slaves should be treated with every consideration, not for the sake of humanity needless to say, but in the owners' interests. 'Slave work is butcher's work', writes Columella, a distinguished rural economist of the Roman world living in the first century A.D., when slavery attained its greatest proportions in the ancient world. He also says:

> *Slaves do* [*the land*] *tremendous damage: they let out oxen for hire, and keep them and other animals poorly fed: they do not plough the ground carefully, and they charge up the sowing of far more seed than they have actually sown; what they have committed to the earth they do not so foster that it will make the proper growth; and when they have brought it to the threshing-floor . . . they themselves steal it and do not guard against the thieving of others, and even when it is stored away they do not enter it honestly in their accounts. The result is that both manager and hands are offenders, and that the land pretty often gets a bad name.*[1]

Elsewhere he writes:

> [*If the master*] *does not frequently attend the work, all business comes to a standstill, just as in an army when the commander is absent. . . . For it is certain that slaves are corrupted by reason of the great remoteness of their masters and . . . are more intent on pillage than on farming.*[2]

And Pliny the Elder, whose disapproval embraces slave labour in every form, adds this:

> *Farming done by slave-gangs hired from houses of correction is utterly bad, as is everything else done by desperate men.*[3]

These passages show only the final stages of a situation which was already virtually in existence in Epicurus' time. The world he lived in was a world headed for destruction, and living in acute anxiety. (And if these opinions of the ancients on slave labour appear prejudiced—as, in part, we may admit that they are—we must not forget at the same time that they are confirmed by identical observations made by slave-owners in modern times and even in nineteenth-century America.)

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[1] Columella; *De Re Rustica*, translated by Harrison Boyd Ash, Loeb Classical Library, 1941, Vol. I, p. 83.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 37–9.

[3] *Natural History*, translated by H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, Vol. V, 1950, p. 213.

Such, in brief outline, were the historical conditions the wisdom of Epicurus sought to cope with. Plato, who lived in the very early stages of this disaster, had had intuitions of the future horrors that Epicurus was to see. For this anxiety in its early stages Plato had offered two solutions. On the one hand he had transferred the hopes of humanity to an after-life by teaching that souls appeared in judgment and received the reward of their righteousness—or else, in punishment of their wickedness, were sent back to new life on earth in either a human or an animal body. But Plato had not lost his care for human society, and he had proposed its reform: a reform that he expounded more particularly in the *Republic*, in his design for a model state.

Epicurus adopted neither of these solutions. His response to a new set of historical conditions, now much harsher, is at the same time a reply to Platonic idealism, which he thought vain and fanciful, and based on a false idea of the world. As regards the reform of society, Epicurus considered it was far too late to essay it. In Plato's time, it seemed still possible to will the *collective* salvation of society: in the time of Epicurus, one could only will the *individual* salvation of each man. He never talks of a model city, but only of immediate efforts to save men. No more thought of social justice, of social progress, for history at the moment was in too desperate a pass. Assuredly, this was a great retreat in Greek thought and civilization, which had set out in conquest of progress in each and every domain. But the pressure of misery and suffering was too heavy—men wanted simply to be saved, each one, and now. Epicurus dealt with what was most urgent: he raised what Dostoevsky calls 'the banner of earthly bread'.

'Earthly'—for Epicurus refused to follow Plato's other line of thought either, that of offering happiness after death. To him that solution was too facile, and moreover false; he did not believe in an immortal soul, he wished to teach man to be happy without delay, in this life, with a happiness that might be modest and limited, but was *certain*—each man could hold it in his hands.

The peculiar greatness of the philosophy of Epicurus was to offer, not, like Plato and like Christianity, an escape into heaven, but a project for this earth. From this stems a wisdom that is eminently practical, but moves straight towards the goal he has most deeply at heart—the happiness of the individual. Yes, Epicurus was what a modern 'philosopher' has called him—one of those 'men so deficient in the finer feelings as to look for happiness on earth'.

For such a man philosophy is no game for intellectuals, no luxury for professors, but labour on the most urgent of all problems.

We must not pretend to study philosophy, but study it in reality: for it is not the appearance of health that we need, but real health.[1]

There is not a moment to be lost for him who seeks to point man towards the truth, which is the only remedy for his ills. And that remedy must be found: happiness is a pressing need that will not wait, and life is much shorter than we succeed in making ourselves think.

Every man passes out of life as though he had just been born.[2]

That is the spirit in which Epicurus reflects and looks for truth.

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And what in the end is this truth? He who wishes to find and give happiness must first realize that men are very unhappy, and why. Why are they?—because they are afraid. The thing is to drive away this fear, this permanent anxiety which is fixed in every heart. Once it is dislodged, through a more accurate view of reality, then only can happiness begin. A modest happiness, as I have said; but a sure one.

Men are unhappy, Epicurus observes: but men are made for joy—there is in him an affirmation which comes from the depths of his being, that joy is necessary, is simple, is immediately at hand, is at every moment within reach. But men are afraid, afraid because of a false view of reality. Afraid of what?

Our first and most essential fear is fear of death. All men know they must die, all fear death; and the thought of death pursues them wherever they go. They try without ceasing to divert their thoughts elsewhere, but even in the dizziest of their diversions it comes back endlessly, to block all their horizons and fill them with horror, with the vertigo of one who stands at the edge of a gulf and knows it is about to swallow him up.

I need not labour the theme—we have Montaigne and we have Pascal, and both are full of Epicurus.

There is another fear linked with the first however—that of the gods. Men imagine that the gods watch them from heaven, spy on them, intervene in their lives, and punish their acts of disobedience or neglect towards their own supreme authority. So men consult oracles or ask their priests for signs and rules of conduct; but the priests know nothing whatever about the real nature of the gods. From this cause springs an incredible mass of absurdities, follies and sometimes crimes in human life—crimes, if legend speaks true, inspired by religion itself. Let all men remember, writes Lucretius (the Latin poet who was so steeped in Epicurus), the horrible crime that Agamemnon committed in obedience to an oracle, when he slew his own daughter Iphigenia at the order supposedly of a goddess. Lucretius uttered on this subject a cry of indignation that has remained famous:

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 115; or, as A. Bonnard translates, 'A man who is sick does not pretend to search for health—he searches.'

[2] *Ibid.*

Tantum relligio potuit suadere malorum!

or 'To what depths of crime could religion drag man down!'

So then, as long as mankind bends under the yoke of this double fear—of death and of the gods—it will remain in its profound wretchedness. But are these terrors well-founded? Epicurus was convinced that they are not, and his whole endeavour was to free men from them. To do so he had to make them realize what the universe is, and how it leaves no room for these absurd gods and this scarecrow death.

This is the boldest step of Epicurus and his most striking act of deliverance. Nothing could be simpler; he seems to take us by the hand and say, 'Look round you at the world, look at it in the light of the all-illuminating sun; and no myth shall hide reality from us under the pretence of revealing it. Look,' he says, 'open your eyes, and listen to the voices of nature.' We have only to look and listen as he tells us. There is water and sky, the stretches of earth with the crops tilled by men—these 'works', as the Greek tongue calls cultivated fields, *erga*, applied equally to tapestries made by the patience of women, and conquests wrought by the sword in war, and even to the wide sea subdued by the arms of oarsmen. Everywhere we see bread to eat, fruits to pick, land to inhabit and till where once reigned forests and wild beasts. He shows us these and says, 'Look, listen. Are you to deny all this? No; you cannot deny the plain truth—all this exists, all this is in great part the work of your own hands. This world of sense which enfolds you, multiform, authentic, irrefutably proven, this world which will last as long as you do—what will you believe in, if you do not believe in this unique and self-evident reality?'

He starts with sensation. He proclaims with the utmost clearness in the Epistle to Herodotus (which, he says, sums up his whole teaching):

> *That bodies exist, sense itself witnesses in the experience of all men, and in accordance with the evidence of sense we must of necessity judge of the imperceptible by reasoning.*[1]

He does rely on reasoning; he uses it magnificently. The same letter states

> *First of all, that nothing is created out of that which does not exist: for if it were, everything would be created out of everything with no need of seeds.*[2]

Lucretius is doing little more than translate Epicurus when he says, 'We shall start from this principle, that nothing is ever begotten of nothing' (adding 'by divine influence') '. . . for if things could come of nothing, every kind could come from everything, and nothing would need a seed'.

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 23.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

(The complete agreement here of the passages of Lucretius and Epicurus—and there are many other such—might authorize us to borrow back from Lucretius much belonging to Epicurus which is hidden in his poem. Where we have done so however, it has been with great discretion.)

It is enough for our purpose that Epicurus restores all its reality to the material world. Here he triumphs and openly exults. The world our senses show us, this world of colours, shapes and movement that offers itself to us with uncontestable reality, the world that so delights us every moment of our life—this world does exist. It exists as much as we do, and will endure in us as long as we do—and after our time too, though not for eternity.

At last we find a philosopher who is not too clever to believe in the evidence of his senses—a philosopher who does not desire to mutilate our nature, a philosopher who thinks simply, with good sense. The sunlit world of our enfranchised senses, the world of joy—it is enough to know that it exists for him and for us. Some of the tones in which he hails it are never to be forgotten:

> *The sun goes round the world proclaiming to all that we should awake to happiness.*[1]

Where Plato had denied existence to the material world and called what our senses reveal non-existence, inventing above him his world of ideal forms accessible to reason alone, Epicurus begins by believing what he sees to be real. He adopts and completes the physics of the old atomist philosopher, Democritus. There is nothing in the universe but atoms, their movement, and the void. From these comes every kind of reality—the objects and living things we see, and those also that we cannot see because they are composed of atoms that are too tenuous. The soul exists: though it has indeed been too much adulated in the Platonic myths, where the poet-philosopher described it as destined to the bliss of his fictitious immortality if virtuous, and, if wicked, to the pitchforks of the demons in the fiery pit. The soul exists, but with a transient existence which can be filled full of joy if it has understood its own nature, and which ends in the peaceful dissolution which is the fate of all earthly things.

The gods exist; but they are complex structures or architectures of material atoms. There are, assuredly, Ideas; but these Ideas are not immaterial entities existing in the absolute outside us: they are no more than the products of our minds, like a crop or a flower that springs from the compost of the life of flesh itself.

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[1] This passage has however been differently interpreted; see below p. 277, note 1 (Translator).

In his physics Epicurus lays down firmly the foundations of a solid materialist doctrine, which had its deficiencies, the most serious of which, in antiquity, was the lack of scientific confirmation, due to the precarious state of the science of the times; but which has never ceased to inspire philosophical research, and more generally to give sustenance to the energies of man.

To modern man, it is a matter of knowledge. To know, he has only to consult his experience—he can photograph atoms, count them, weigh them. He splits their nuclei, and liberates their energy. The atom is no conjecture for the modern scientist; it is not an invention, but a discovery; not a fiction, but one of his data—at least for every savant who is not blinkered by idealistic prejudice. It is an object, an objective reality.

Epicurus, on the other hand, is forced by the state of science in his time to make no more than a conjecture, though it is a conjecture of genius. Following Democritus, but amplifying the theory of his predecessor, he states that the universe is composed of small particles of primary matter, invisible to us—elements uncreated, imperishable, unchanging, indivisible, and borne along in an eternal movement.

Epicurus restores to matter its reality, never again to be questioned. He restores to our bodies, so little esteemed by Plato, their true consistency as material objects. To our souls he gives their own specific weight as mortal entities, like any other entities in nature.

Thus there is nothing in the world but things, beings composed of atoms that move and combine in the void. Combinations of atoms form not only bodies, but numerous worlds which Epicurus represents as separated all over the universe by immense empty spaces. The world we know, with its sun, earth, planets and life is only one of many such in the universe. To this hypothesis, which modern science has confirmed, Epicurus adds another—that in the spaces between these systems, intervals that Epicurus calls *intermundia*, live the gods, who are material beings, but happy, and perfect.

Such is the physics of Epicurus. It is very simple; if pressed, we might admit that it is even over-simplified. Epicurus does not ignore physics, but the picture it gives of the world interests him principally on account of the ethics he derives from it. On this materialistic physical basis he constructs an ethic which is original, sound, and bold, at once comforting and courageous.

To begin with the gods, and the fear of the gods. Epicurus believes in the gods—he is not, then, an atheist in the strict sense of the term. But he liquidates them, so to speak, from human life: for practical purposes he is an atheist. In their *intermundia* where they live in bliss and sovereign peace, why should the gods be concerned with us—above all, be concerned to harm us? They live with no other concern than their own felicity; and, in so doing, they give us an example of what we should be doing if we are not fools. 'They have no need of us,' writes Epicurus, 'nor can we earn their favour by deserving.' Elsewhere he says that it is absurd to imagine that the gods 'can be troubled to punish the guilty and reward the good'. Take just one look at human life; can we see anything of the kind? As for punishments and rewards in an after-life, they are obviously wishful thinking: it is no more true that the soul is immortal than that it existed before the body.

Neither the world, nor human history, are to be explained by the action of a providence; nowhere do we find providence revealed by actions reasonable, just or benevolent. Not that human life is given over to utter disorder; but such order as can be seen in it is the order which man has been setting up since his first appearance in nature. The moment the human animal begins to reign in the world, progress may accelerate, as it will do without ceasing if man keeps watch. This is his proper function. Everything, then, can be accounted for without the gods, in the first place by the behaviour of the atoms, in the second by the needs of man and the control he is capable of acquiring over his desires in order to satisfy them.

At all events there is no need of the gods to explain the universe. Civilization, particularly, is accounted for by man alone. Here, unfortunately, we lack texts by Epicurus himself, but we have an admirable picture of the history of civilization as it was traced by his Latin disciple Lucretius.

Here are some of the details. Men, like the first living things, sprang from the earth. At first they formed only savage herds—no language, no dwellings, no techniques, no arts; no families, only temporary matings. Hunting, fishing and uneasy slumbers in the depths of caves, such was the life of our ancestors. Then, little by little, they learnt, first, how to keep up the fire that fell from heaven, then, later, how to light it themselves; they built huts, made clothes, tools, weapons, domesticated animals. Soon came agriculture, the growth of towns, political organization, law and justice. After centuries and centuries, mankind acquired a degree of leisure and invented dancing, singing, music and poetry. Then came a turn for the worse. With civilization came excessive ambitions—insatiable greed for wealth, lust for domination at all costs, and religious creeds which exploited this, and war, and the dissolution of society and civilization itself.

It remains true none the less that we have not the gods to thank for civilization, which is a good we have conquered ourselves. Civilization, writes Epicurus, is 'the fruit of experience and toil'. 'Time and the work of men create all inventions and bring them to light in their turn.' We have to trust in ourselves, not to call on the gods. Above all we have to stop fearing them, for this fear paralyses and maddens us. Confidence in ourselves, in our own wisdom, modest but sure. The fear of the gods once dispelled, the universe is without mystery and without anxiety.

Remains the fear of death, more debilitating but even more absurd than the other. Death is nothing to us, strictly nothing. We cannot even be conscious of it, any more than of a simple fainting-fit. The particles of our being, and of our consciousness of existence, decompose just as every compound must one day decompose; but it is an entirely natural occurrence. Moreover, when it occurs we are no longer there to be conscious of it. In a decisive argument, found in one of the letters that have been preserved, Epicurus proves that death is nothing to us.

So long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist.[1]

Thus we never have a second's contact with death: our perturbation and terror at the thought are as silly as those of a baby at some imagined bogy. Once dead, we shall be as insensible of the happenings of this world as we were before birth. Do we bewail the fact that we were not alive a century ago? Then why bewail the fact that we shall not be alive a century hence?

Epicurus does not forget, indeed, the physical suffering that may precede death; but against that, have we not our courage and our dignity? He, if anyone, has the right to take this tone, for he suffered terribly, for years, in his own body. This grievous sufferer never complained, and physical suffering never disturbed his peace and happiness. As for moral suffering, he conquered it as being unworthy of a reasoning being. Thus was dispelled, together with the fears that most disturb mankind, the principal cause of their unhappiness. But what is left to man? This conception of wisdom seems at first sight rather negative. According to Epicurus it is not: for it is enough that pain be interrupted and certain simple needs and elementary desires satisfied, for man to be restored to his natural vocation; it is enough to remove the suffering that diminishes him and makes him cry out, for man to find himself whole once again, and be happy. The vocation of man is joy, and this truth can never be too often repeated. Take away pain: no more is needed to bring forth joy.

See how simple it all is, if we are to believe Epicurus. The flesh cries out for deliverance from hunger, thirst or cold; not much is needed to still those cries, simple nature is not very demanding. Not to be hungry, thirsty, in pain—such pleasure may appear meagre and static. I have said that the wisdom of Epicurus was modest but sure. The economy of his demands shows clearly enough what was the despair of the age when they were formulated—this wisdom was concerned to save the essentials of man under a menace; man simply wished no more than to stop suffering, fearing, and living on illusions. Epicurus gave him the joy of being snatched from death, reprieved from execution: and that, in spite of appearances, can be a most intense joy. Man remains entire, his consciousness is restored to him, and his desires, being limited, he can satisfy; he recovers a certain balance in his life that most men have lost. Those others are madmen, always occupied by new cravings, artificial cravings which often it would be much simpler to forget than to satisfy; never content within the limits of a simple, natural life. In truth, they never live, being taken up with the pursuit of the 'means to live', as he puts it. But the wise man knows that life must not be put off till tomorrow, but lived today, and each second of today. Each moment of happiness, each desire satisfied in pleasure (and what if the desire is for a trifling good? the important thing is that it should be satisfied), each moment of pleasure, once gained, becomes as it were an eternal possession. Man can accept the world and live his life; the passage of time is no longer a succession of wants frustrated, possessions lost, and hopes threatened or betrayed; he is not carried away by time, he lives in settled possession of joy.

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 85.

The strength and boldness of this philosophy is in the ceaselessly repeated affirmation that man was born for joy, and that joy is based on the body and on the close relationship between the flesh and our consciousness of living. Epicurus has written a sentence which has seemed scandalous to many: 'The beginning and the root of all good is the pleasure of the stomach.' (It must indeed cause offence to people who have never known hunger and seek their pleasure from other things, for example the possession of rarities which they 'can't take with them'.) Of a truth as we look round us—and the occasion may offer in our own country no later than tomorrow—we should take care never to forget that it is an entirely illusory philosophy which does not begin with the material conditions of consciousness. Worse—it is inhuman. Epicurus, for his part, never forgot for an instant that the powers of thought and expression are closely linked with the ability to eat and drink and the joy of drawing breath.

In point of fact, a materialistic philosophy would not be very different today, at its starting-point and in its principles, from that of Epicurus. But, in a world where the satisfaction of infinitely more desires has become possible, conceivable and legitimate—even if at present the achievement of this hope is clearly under a heavy menace—this philosophy based on materialism would today be far more ambitious: it would be the most ambitious of all.

Epicurus tells us emphatically that we can experience great joys and great pleasures—he is a man who was never scared of the word pleasure—but these pleasures must be simple and natural and correspond to real needs: eating so as not to starve, drinking so as not to die of thirst, and only when hungry or thirsty.

Bread and water produce the highest pleasure, when one who needs them puts them to his lips,[1] he said. And also, of course, eating something good, drinking something refreshing; and also enjoying the pleasures of sex. But always when it corresponds to a need, a natural genuine desire; to complicate pleasure by creating artificial wants, by living a life of never-satisfied ambition, of greed and vanity, is not to increase pleasure and joy but to destroy them for ever.

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 89.

Pleasure is the well-earned prize of him who holds his desires well in check, controls them, and puts them aside if he knows he cannot fulfil them. Pleasure and joy crown those who are temperate, courageous, and self-controlled. In this teaching which some have judged so licentious, the conception of pleasure which lies at its centre implies possession of the loftiest virtues—and firstly courage, the first inborn virtue of the Greek people, running like a scarlet thread in a white sailcloth through the whole of its history, to become in the fulness of time—since Socrates—a pondered and reasoned courage, founded on respect for and exact knowledge of reality. What a wonderful thing it was, this late flowering of ancient wisdom at the very moment of its decline!

These virtues, according to Epicurus, can ensure us perfect serenity in any circumstances; a man who fears nothing, a man who can be content with little, is always happy to live. 'A scrap to eat, a sip to drink, and a plank to lie on', says an ancient commentator, 'and Epicurus would be game to talk away till dawn—not merely with his friends, but Zeus in person!' Such was the man they have sought to make the incarnation of debauchery.

This sick man, who suffered uncomplainingly for years the often excruciating pain of stone in the bladder—this man in torture, who towards the end could do no more than have himself carried into the inner courtyard of his house, never ceased through all this to preach that life was worth living even so, in the satisfaction of the most elementary desires, and also, and above all, in the perfect joy to be derived from the noblest of human passions, friendship. This passion was enough to lighten, warm and ennoble his own life, to give him perfect fulfilment. It reveals his whole nature at one stroke, in its kindliness and deeply-implanted love for the other human being—his fellow, made of the same mortal flesh as himself and doomed to the same unspeakable agonies, but also free of the same pleasures through the sensitive instrument of the same flesh and free of the same joy of love for another. Such was Epicurean friendship at its starting-point.

His disciples and friends would come and visit him in this garden, or, towards the end, this miserable court. Epicurus told them how friendship infinitely multiplied the pleasure of living. Here was the finest fruit of the circumscribed philosophy of Epicurus—friendship, the sharing of necessities, the pooling of simple pleasures. But at this point, through friendship, the philosophy ceased to be circumscribed, it extended to the whole community of men. Has not an ancient author written that after the death of Epicurus the number of his friends was so great that they could be counted 'by whole cities'?

This sage, then, who seemed at first so narrow and so isolated, had something in him so warm and so fraternal, so abounding a source of strength, that men had come again and again to slake their thirst in it. 'Epicurus' life,' writes one of his disciples, 'when compared to other men's in respect of gentleness and self-sufficiency might be thought a mere legend.'[1]

I should like to define more closely this conception of Epicurean friendship which constituted the ultimate flowering of a man and a philosophy.

It is true that all the philosophies of antiquity, all that we call by the frigid, chilling term of philosophical schools, appeared as clusters of individual friendships—bonds formed between men who accepted the guidance of a master in the search for a truth which had become an indispensable need of their austerely simplified lives. They sought a truth that they could live, a truth which could take hold of men left isolated by the ruin of the city-states, and bind them into new communities.

When Epicurus left Asia Minor to settle in Athens, some of his disciples and friends went with him, while others stayed behind. Distance did not sever their bond of friendship, but strengthened it, as it sometimes may. If after that Epicurus once or twice made up his mind to leave Athens for a while, it was, he said, to go and see 'the friends in Ionia'.

Meanwhile they wrote letters. This is the beginning of prose correspondences—or rather they began a little earlier with Plato. The phenomenon is so startling that modern scholars have long suspected the authenticity of all the letters attributed to Plato: but today in large part they have been rehabilitated. In his *Sixth Epistle* Plato advises three of his disciples, who are separated, but only by short distances, 'to try to form a close mutual bond of friendship'. We know too that even before Plato there had been Pythagorean circles of friends; and they, no doubt, corresponded.

So Epicureans who were isolated wrote to one another. They sent sometimes long epistles, expounding fundamental points of the teaching at length, sometimes personal letters full of practical advice and moral exhortation, in a very familiar, friendly tone, the tone of an elder brother to a young man in difficulty. A long friendly exchange full of warmth, where discussion of the most recondite intellectual difficulties may sometimes be mingled with the casuistical science of a letter of spiritual direction. The master addressed young people who had placed their trust in him, speaking with entire self-forgetfulness and great efforts to be simple and clear, of the difficulties he had encountered before them in the search for happiness.

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[1] Trans. cited, p. 111.

Sometimes it is the tone of the Epistles to the Romans and the Corinthians—of the Epistles of Paul, but also those of Peter and James: always it is the tone of Epicurus, that of a quest after truth, maintained with tenacity, in common with those who have given themselves to him in a bond of friendship confirmed by time. As we see, Epicurean groups were being formed in the world of the third century B.C. in the manner of 'churches'. Since the city-states had disappeared or begun to disappear, men needed above all else to find shelter in a community again.

If Epicurus brought an unequalled intensity to the enjoyment of living and possessing certain elementary good things of life, it was because it saved him from bottomless gulfs of solitude, from the nakedness of despair. He knew now, through the friendship of men which he had conquered, that this priceless benefit could not be taken from him except by death. He was not alone in having tasted the misery of living: every man had tasted it. 'The whole earth lives in hardship; and it is against the hardships of life that we men have received most gifts.'

But this gave rise also to the experience of a kind of friendship that was the most surprising discovery made by Epicurus—the most Greek as well. His attitude links up with words that we found at the other end of the chain of Hellenic life—the deeply moving words, already quoted, spoken by Achilles to Lycaon his enemy as he lifted up his sword to strike him: 'Yes, my friend, you too must die . . . ; even Patroclus died, who was a better man than you.'[1] The words are so strange addressed to an enemy, that many scholars, rather than understand them, prefer to emend the text that sets them such a problem. There is no problem, except that of the man who, at the very moment of killing, feels an indubitable bond uniting him with this other human being who shares with him the condition of mortality. In the same way Epicurus can call any man, friend or enemy, by the name of 'friend'. No other sentiment than friendship can express the profound solidarity that binds us all to each of our brothers in misfortune, all candidates for that test that all men 'pass'—death at the last.

So Epicurean friendship is the perfect confirmation of all Epicurus: not an intermediate state towards the attaining of the Good, or of God who is the Supreme Good, but an end in itself.

Though the cult of friendship prevails in most of the schools of philosophy, there is nevertheless a profound difference between the Epicurean and the Pythagorean or Platonic conceptions. In the other circles the friendships were restricted to men: that to which Epicurus would lead was—we known by the very names of his disciples—open to any human creature. Certain disciples came to visit the master accompanied by their lawful wives; but the presence of names such as Leontion, Hedia, Erotion, Nicidion and the like in the circle of disciples, denotes women free to dispose of their own bodies in pleasure. That may have given rise to unpleasant rumours. But, in that garden where the others admitted them as equals, and recognized their dignity as human personalities made of the same flesh and composed of identical atoms, living in pleasure with friends who had chosen them, the 'mistresses' of certain of them, they represented the same precarious human life as the others; they lived as 'free women', not bound by the contract known as marriage. These women in this circle were not, as the *hetairai* had been in earlier times, slaves of the married woman. Someone at last conceded them a soul and watched over the well-being of that soul that they sought to discover along with him.

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[1] Cf. p. 150, note 1.

Epicurus was so impressed with the intellectual and moral qualities of some of these 'free women' that he used to invest one with the temporary chairmanship when it came round to his turn by the rules of the group.

The names of several other young women indicate that they were slaves—an additional victory to the credit of the circle, over one of the most tenacious of ancient prejudices. A victory of friendship.

But Epicurean friendship was not only a factor of reconciliation and liberation for man and woman alike. It was much more besides; it was, as I have said, an end in itself. What was this end?

Epicurus was too much of a Greek to be able to conceive it possible to conquer and possess happiness in solitude: no, happiness was the reward of a search made by humans in common. Its crown was friendship, because friendship created the ideal society, the master with his disciples; only in such a community could human life find healing. So friendship was wisdom itself, not simply the means to wisdom. It was in the heart-to-heart dialogue of master with disciples that they would find at last that peace of soul which was not merely 'ataraxia' (freedom from what disturbs), but full serenity, perfect bliss, and supreme harmony.

Here are some of the reflexions that have been preserved on friendship: though fewer than we should wish they all come together on this peak of the Epicurean doctrine. For it is here, in the concept of friendship, that Epicureanism finds its climax, as Christianity a little later in the love of one's neighbour.

Of all the things which wisdom acquires to produce the blessedness of the complete life, far the greatest is the possession of friendship.

It is not so much our friends' help that helps us as the confidence of their help.

All friendship is desirable in itself, though it starts from the need for help.

Friendship springs from the necessities of life, but it is shaped and fostered by community of life among those that have attained full happiness.

The wise man is not more pained when being tortured himself, than when seeing his friend tortured.

Friendship goes dancing round the world proclaiming to us all to awake to the praises of a happy life.[1]

(The word *macarismos* in the last sentence is a term of the religious vocabulary implying the idea of salvation. The friends of Epicurus are to congratulate each other on having been saved. But we may also translate more simply 'to awake to happiness'.)

Let us show our feeling for our lost friends not by lamentation but by meditation.[2]

One could wish it were possible to quote, for Epicurean friendship, something other than these rather abstract maxims. The letters we have lost also contained anecdotes which are often very significant; but most of the letters written in a personal tone are empty of any emotions that are at all vivid. The manufacturers of adages keep nothing but the adages and strip away pitilessly the story in which they had been inserted.

Here and there we still possess short notes, in a fairly bad state of preservation, but affecting by the interest they attest in the smallest trifles, like this one, from Epicures to a child whom he admonishes to 'be good'.

We have arrived at Lampsacus safe and sound, Pythocles and Hermarchus and Ctesippus and I, and there we found Themista and our other friends all well. I hope you too are well and your mamma, and that you are always obedient to papa and Matro, [*the slave who takes him to school*] *as you used to be. Let me tell you that the reason that I and all the rest of us love you is that you are always obedient to them.*[3]

His affection for his younger disciples comes out in yet other missives. To Pythocles, who was not yet eighteen when he came to the master, he writes:

I will sit down and wait for your lovely and godlike appearance.[4]

He entrusts the youth to the care of his friend Polynaeus, and sees to it that Idomeneus, another intimate, does not give him too much money.

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[1] It must however be noted that the text of this maxim has been questioned: some scholars read at the beginning not 'Friendship . . .' but 'The sun . . .'. A translation of this second reading appears above, p. 281, note 1—Author's note (expanded).

[2] Trans. cited, pp. 101, 111, 109, 115, 117.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

[4] *Ibid.*

'If you wish to make Pythocles rich,' he writes, 'do not give him more money, but diminish his desire.'[1]

These young men on whom he lavished so much affection found it hard to check the signs of their gratitude and love; for the master would only accept demonstrations that were simple and restrained. Take the case of Colotes, one of the disciples of the earliest days, at Lampsacus in Ionia. There was a very close friendship between him and Epicurus, who often addressed him by affectionate diminutives such as Colotaras or Colotarion; but one day while Epicurus was discoursing on nature, Colotes suddenly fell on his knees.

> *In your feeling of reverence for what I was then saying you were seized with an unaccountable desire to embrace me and clasp my knees and show me all the signs of homage paid by men in prayers and supplications to others; so you made me return all these proofs of veneration and respect to you. Go on thy way as an immortal and think of us too as immortal.*[1]

So runs one of the letters of Epicurus. Colotes was one of those who have to exteriorize their feelings: Epicurus to him was a light-giver, and he greeted him as such. 'Once thou appearest, O Titan, the rest is but shadow.' The master only smiled, and made a humorous rejoinder, as the quotation shows. He understood youth well enough to know that one of its deepest needs is to find a guide, whose words and example may serve as a rule of life; as he said:

> *The veneration of the wise man is a great blessing to those who venerate him.*[2]

His first-generation disciples speak in the tones of men who have been privileged to share the life of a superior being; in partaking of Epicurean friendship, they had known the presence of divinity. Long afterwards Lucretius, the sworn enemy of any conception of the divine, speaks more than once of Epicurus alone as of a god.

A god was he, Memmius, yes, a god, who first found out the way of life men now call Wisdom.
'O plain, simple and forthright way!'

writes Cicero of Epicureanism in a moment of significant enthusiasm.

Belief in the master, obedience, mutual love—such was the way opened up by Epicureanism. Can we say it was open to the Roman Empire, which, we know, did not go that way? In passing let us not forget to consider one final extremely moving image, which coincides with the Lucretian phase of Epicureanism—that of the six thousand slaves who revolted with Spartacus and who were crucified along the highroad from Capua to Rome. For the first time the foundations of the ancient world had shifted, foundations which had appeared eternal in their strength. Lucretius' day was no less disturbed than that of Epicurus, with dictator following dictator, war after war, conspiracy after conspiracy, civil strife, murder, bloody repression—a chaos that spelt the collapse of the Roman republic.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 127.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 129.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

But the most tragic image is still that of those six thousand slaves on their crosses—tragic, and *uncomprehended*. For who was there capable of comprehending the significance of their revolt and its brutal repression? Lucretius was a man who thought accurately, but only between narrow limits; he was a Roman knight. He thought as an Epicurean, but from within a society already doomed because it carried in it that rotten root of slavery which it could not tear out without ending its own existence. He blasphemed against his own atheism, and his blasphemies could not save him.

◎

Epicureanism lived on till the fourth century of the Christian era. We have preserved a very touching testimony of this. A distant disciple of Epicurus—distant, but strictly loyal, for no heresy ever appeared in this school built on probity—resolved to erect a monument to the continuing life of his creed, five hundred years after the master had ceased to teach in Athens.

It was a time when the ancient world was already losing all confidence in its own virtues, and giving up the values that had made for its greatness, to plunge into the mystic consolations of the neo-Pythagoreans and the Gnostics, or even the grossest superstition. The old Epicurean, named Diogenes of Oenoanda (the town in Cappadocia where he lived), had an inscription engraved on the wall of a portico; the message of his religion, we may call it. Diogenes' contemporaries, immersed in their superstitions, can hardly have been still in a state to understand it: but for us it is one of the last monuments of the wisdom of antiquity. It says:

Now that age has brought me to the sunset of my days, and I expect hourly to have to leave the world lamenting the plenitude of my joy, I have resolved to give some help now, lest I should lack the time later, to those in a right state of mind. If one man, or two, or three or four or as many as you will, called on me for help in distress, I would do all in my power to counsel him well. And today, as I have said, the most part of mankind are sick, as of an epidemic; their sickness is their false beliefs about the world, and it is worsening as it spreads by imitation from one to another, as among a flock of sheep. Moreover it is only right to succour those that will come after us—they also belong to us, though they are not yet born, and love for man bids us help any strangers that may *pass this way. Since the good message of the book has already been published, I have resolved to use this wall to exhibit openly the cure for the ills of man.*

This remedy was no other than the *tetrapharmakon* formulated by the master and preserved among his 'Principal doctrines': it was contained in twelve Greek words, which may be rendered:

There is nothing to fear from the gods.
There is nothing to fear from death.
Pain can be endured.
Happiness can be attained.

But long before this, Christian thought had discerned in the materialism and 'atheism' of Epicurus the most dangerous adversary of its own faith and the resolute opponent of its spiritual dominion. Clement of Alexandria wrote, 'If the apostle Paul attacks the philosophers, he is only thinking of the Epicureans.'

To the doctors of the new law, Plato's idealism appeared more easily assimilable, and in the last resort far less subversive, than Epicureanism. Plato came forward much rather as an ally than an enemy, as a firm supporter of Christian spiritualism. The dreams of Platonism rejoiced to find themselves embodied in the 'truths' of Christianity. And at the same time men realized, as the end of the ancient world approached and hunger stalked the world, that the 'philosophy of the stomach' did not provide food to eat. The world—the civilized world at least—was breaking down and perishing in famine and blood. And then Epicureanism fell asleep for a long time to come.

Is it dead? Do not believe it, it can never die; it is one of the authentic faces of mankind. A sleeping face, wrapped in sullen slumber. Go and see it in Rome, at the *Museo delle Terme*; the head of the Sleeping Erinye. It has the face of one who rejects our passing day, yet is ready to wake when these times of enigma bring in the world it dreams of. . . .

Our universe is being convulsed by revolutions which change and hasten the course of history. New classes are on the march, and new classless peoples. The heritage of Epicurus is theirs, and waits for them.

After Montaigne, who saw in Epicurus one of his own forgotten ancestors, appropriated him and continued his work, comes Gassendi, then the 'libertins'; then the men of the Enlightenment recognize his voice. Helvetius writes a long poem on *Le Bonheur* (very mediocre), and an *Eloge du plaisir*. Anatole France, André Gide are fellow-workers. Karl Marx hails him as one of the greatest liberators of man.

Not yet has humanity conquered the fear of death, not yet forgotten that there once existed gods. The fight goes on.

Now Epicurus rises again, still the same, unchanged as the Galaxy itself. While he slept men have been inventing instruments, telescopes, microscopes, innumerable appliances for seeing, for photographing, for reproducing the atomic dance of matter. Epicurus takes up one of them, looks, and laughs for joy. Now he can see his atoms! . . .

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

In this volume the author has endeavoured to depict, by the choice of a few characteristic examples, a much wider period of Greek civilization than in the last—the period from Euripides to Alexandria. If he had attempted to recount all that was of interest it would have stretched over five centuries and more; whereas volume II, from the *Antigone* to Socrates, took in barely more than fifty years.

He has not refrained from tampering with the time-sequence, nor from deliberate omissions nor from exceeding the dates generally accepted as the limits of Greek civilization, nor from falling short of them. All he has done is the result of a choice; a choice which to many readers will seem arbitrary. Thus, he has allowed the philosophers much less space and importance than they usually receive; while giving more, on the other hand, to the savants. He considered it more natural to direct attention to them in a time like ours, so enamoured of scientific knowledge.

The following are some among many (not including the works themselves, his principal source) of the books which the author has used, and sometimes plundered without scruple. To them he owes a great part of whatever may have been found valuable in the preceding pages.

The author has often said, and likes to repeat, tha. the books he writes are written with the help of those who like them.

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N.B. I have had the privilege of utilizing a work by Claude Mossé, as yet unpublished and deposited at the Library of the Sorbonne, entitled *Aspects sociaux et politiques du déclin de la cité grecque au IVe siècle avant Jésus-Christ.* I desire to express my thanks to him here. I also thank my friend Samuel Gagnebin, Professor of Physics at Neuchâtel, for his explanations of the 'steam-engine' of Hero of Alexandria.

INDEX

Academy, the, 80, 114, 115, 178, 193
Achilles, 31, 32, 94, 137, 139, 142, 150, 153, 224, 275
Aeacus, 100
Aegeus, 22, 23
Aeneid, the, 227–8
Aeschines, 65, 70, 72
Aeschylus, 17, 18, 27, 85, 89, 142, 149–50, 159, 181
Agamemnon, 28, 30–3, 36, 150, 267
Agassiz, Louis, 124
Agathocles, 165–6
Agave, 43–5, 49–51
Alcibiades, 54–5, 61, 76, 112
Alexander, 16–17, 64, 65, 71, 73, 115–16, 134–150, 170, 174, 182, 189, 194, 201, 252, 263
Alexandria, 116, 155, 159, 164, 170–88, 193, 198–228
Alexandrian Poetry, 17, 167, 179–81, 209–28, 233, 236, 252
Alexarchus, 157–8
Amphipolis, Battle of, 55
Amyntas, 114
Anaxagoras, 57, 182, 184–5
Antigonus, 161–3
Antioch, 155, 159, 200
Antipater, 73
Aphrodite, 49, 146, 158, 217, 218
Apis, 140, 164
Apollo, 116, 146, 165, 214, 257
Apollonius of Rhodes, 174, 179, 180, 192, 209–228
Apology, the, 79
Aratus, 212
Archelaus, 39
Archimedes, 178, 181, 185–6, 202–3, 206
Archytas, 81, 106, 206
Ardiaeus, 101
Argonauts, 192, 212, 214–24
Aristarchus, 179, 181–8
Aristophanes, (comic poet), 80, 95, 110, 112, 149, 150, 159, 175, 229, 233, 237, 254
Aristophanes of Byzantium, 174, 179
Aristotle, 16, 105, 114–34, 149–51, 155–6, 172–4, 178, 187, 194, 198–9, 246, 261
Arrhidaeus, 161
Arrian, 135, 138, 142, 161
Arsinoe I, 165–6
Arsinoe II, 166–8
Artemis, 27, 216, 234, 257
Astronomy, 16, 179, 181–8
Athena, (*see also* Pallas), 162, 214, 217, 218
Athenaeus, 175–6
Athens, 17, 22, 52–74, 77–80, 99, 103–6, 134, 136, 143, 150, 155, 162–4, 174–5, 185, 201–2, 262–3, 274, 279
  Democracy of, 53, 56, 63, 69, 73–4, 77, 80, 83–4, 86
Augustine, 108–10
Aulis, 27–8, 32, 37

Babylon, 142, 147, 158, 161, 174, 182, 252–3
Bactriana, 143–6, 155
Barbarians, 135, 138, 142, 147–57
Basil, St., 109
Bérard, Victor, 196
Berenice, 164–7
Berosus, 175
Biology, 16, 117–33
Boeotia, 58
Bossuet, 52
Britain, 190
British Museum, 246
Buddhism, 144, 146
Byzantine era, 42, 174, 176
Byzantium, 66, 104

Cadmus, 41, 44, 47–50
Caesar, Julius, 175, 177, 190, 197
Calabria, 237
Callicles, 79
Callimachus, 174, 179, 193, 209–13, 225, 229, 231
Callines, 154
Callisthenes, 155–6
Calypso, 215, 217
Cambyses, 140, 143
Camus, 129
Carthage, 109, 158

Cassander, 172
Catherine the Great, 82
Catholicism, 85, 108–9
Chaeronea, battle of, 71, 73, 116
Chalciope, 218, 220, 221
Chaldaea, 182, 188
Charmides, 76–7
Chenier, André, 193, 216
China, 146, 158
Chloe, 252–8
Christ, 42, 45, 109, 158
Christendom, 86
Christianity, 16, 47, 80, 93, 99, 107, 109, 110, 114, 177, 265, 276, 280
Cicero, 110, 212, 262, 278
Cimon, 99
Circe, 215
Cithaeron, 43–4
City-states, 16, 52–74, 134, 228
Claudius (Roman emperor), 177
Claudius, Ptolemaeus, 187, 194
Cleon, 54, 55, 60
Cleopatra, 177
Clitus, 153, 156, 161
Clytemnestra, 29–33
Cnossus, 88
Colchis, 18, 138, 214
Columella, 264
Communism, 83, 85
Constitution of Athens, The (by Aristotle), 173
Copernicus, 179, 185–7
Corcyra, 63
Corinth, 18, 21, 58, 106
Cos, 243, 244, 251
Cratinus, 233
Creon, 21
Crete, 88
Crimea, 104
Critias, 76–7
Ctesibius, 203
Ctesicles, 105
Curtius, Quintus, 140
Cynicism, 144–5, 172
Cypris, 22, 214, 242, 257
Cyprus, 162
Cyrus, 143

Dandamis, 145
Dante, 101
Danube, the, 136, 224
Darius III, 137–40, 143, 155
Darwin, 130
Daphnis, 240–2, 252–8
Daphnis and Chloe (title), 252–8
Demades, 72
Demeter, 235, 244, 245
Demetrius of Phalerum, 172–5
Demetrius Poliorcetes, 162–3
Democritus, 57, 119, 181, 260, 268–9
Demosthenes, 16, 58, 63–74, 82–3, 87, 103, 110, 115, 134, 136, 148–9, 249
Diadochi, the, 162–3
Dichaearchus, 194
Diderot, 82
Dinocrates, 170
Dio Cassius, 177
Diodotus I, 145
Diogenes of Oenoanda, 279
Dion, 81–2
Dionysius I, 69, 81
Dionysius II, 69, 82
Dionysus, 39–51, 136, 144, 153, 168, 251
Dioscuri, the, 35
Diotima, 108
Dostoevsky, 265
Dracon, 103

Ecbatana, 142
Ecclesiastes, 175–6
Egypt, 139–42, 146, 151, 158, 160–1, 163–4, 166, 168, 171, 174–6, 198, 200, 202, 205, 232, 246–7
Elysian fields, 94
Engineering, 106–7, 201–8
Epaminondas, 66
Epicurus, 259–81
Ephesus, 138
Erasistratus, 200
Eratosthenes, 179, 189–97, 224
Eros, 35–6, 218–19, 241
Ethics, 60, 117, 131–3
Ethiopia, 253
Eubulus, 72
Euclid, 178, 202
Eudoxus, 106, 192–4
Euphrates, 139, 142
Euripides, 17–51, 83, 116, 150, 174, 211, 262
Eurydice, 164–5
Euthydemus, 192

France, Anatole, 280
Frederick II, 82

Galatea, 230–1
Galen, 114
Galileo, 187
Ganymede, 218
Garden, the (of Epicurus), 261
Gangamela, battle of, 142
Generation of Animals, The (by Aristotle), 118, 121–5, 127
Geography, 189–97, 225, 251
Geometry, 86, 106–7, 178, 185, 201–5
Gide, André, 280
Goethe, 253–4
Golden Fleece, 18, 214, 217, 219, 224
Gorgias, 76
Gorgias, The (of Plato), 79–81, 99–101, 106
Granicus, battle of, 137–8, 148

Halicarnassus, 156
Hannibal, 151
Helen, 35–7
Hellenistic civilisation, 114, 155, 159–60, 163, 178, 188, 191, 206
Hellespont, 137
Hephaeston, 155
Hera, 37, 110, 166, 193, 217–18, 224
Heracles, 136, 140, 142, 144, 215, 216, 228
Heraclides of Pontus, 184–5
Heraclitus, 119
Herculaneum (painting at), 248
Hermes, 37, 193
Hermias, 115
Hermocrates, 60–1
Hero, 203–8
Herodas, 212, 232, 236, 246–51
Herodotus, 52, 57, 106, 120–1, 149, 191, 217
Herophilus, 198–200
Herpylis, 117
Hesiod, 193, 234, 236, 254
Hippalus, 192
Hipparchus, 178, 186–7, 191
Hippias (the sophist), 76
Hippocrates, 16, 57, 122, 181, 198
History of Animals, The (by Aristotle), 117 121, 129, 132
Hitler, 68
Hittites, 207
Homer, 75, 85, 95, 100, 110, 149–50, 152, 176, 196, 210, 214–17, 225, 229, 232, 237, 254
Hylas, 216
Hypsipsyle, 214–15, 248

Ida, Mt., 36–7, 88
Iliad, the (of Homer), 110, 116, 139, 150, 157, 211, 214, 238
India, 143–6, 153, 155, 192, 194, 252
Ionia, 107, 181, 278
Iphigenia, 27–38, 267
Isis, 166
Isocrates, 73, 104, 251
Issus, battle of, 139
Italy, 81, 98, 100, 101

Jansenists, 109
Jason, 18–19, 21–5, 192, 212, 214–15, 217–27, 248
Jason of Pherae, 69
Jerome, St., 109
Jerusalem, 171
Jews, 158, 171, 175–6
Juvenal, 146

La Bruyère, 109
Laches, 76
Lagidae, the, 160, 164
Lamia, 163
Laws, The (of Plato), 78, 88, 107
Lemnos, 214–15
Leucippus, 57
Library, the (of Alexandria), 170–80, 193, 209
Livy, 203
Longus, 252–8
Lucretius, 187, 260, 266–8, 270, 278–9
Lyceum, the, 116, 173, 178, 199
Lydia, 40–1, 46
Lysander, 77
Lysias, 249
Lysimachus, 165–6
Lysis, 76

Macedonia and Macedonians, 39, 64, 69, 73, 104, 114–16, 136, 139, 142, 146–8, 153–6, 165
Maenads, 39–44, 47–8, 135, 144, 257
Manetho, 175
Manicheism, 108–9
Margiana, 143
Marx, Karl, 280
Massilia (and Marseilles), 189–92, 206, 252
Medea, 18–26, 212, 217–27
Medici, Cosimo de', 96
Medicine, 16, 57, 122, 198–201
Melkart, 140

Memphis, 140–1, 164
Menelaus, 28, 31–3, 36
Middle Ages, the, 16, 86–7, 178, 187, 192, 198, 201
Miletus, 138
Miltiades, 99
Molière, 16
Montaigne, 52, 111, 266, 280
Müller, Johannes, 124
Muses, the, 41, 49, 111–12, 116, 168, 173, 213, 241–2, 249
Museum, the (of Alexandria), 116, 160, 169, 170–80, 198–9, 209, 247
Mytilene, 54, 115

Naucratis, 138
Nicanor, 117
Nicomachean Ethics, The (of Aristotle), 131–2
Nicomachus (Aristotle's father), 114, (Aristotle's son), 117
Nicias, 53–5
Nietzsche, 17, 76, 79
Norway, 190, 253 (*see* Thule)

Odysseus, 16, 94, 100, 112, 130, 196, 201, 215–216
Odyssey, The (of Homer), 94, 152, 196, 215–16
Oedipus, 32
Olympias, 135–6, 141–2, 151, 158
Olynthus, 67
Opis, 152–3
Orestes, 29
Oreus, 67–8
Orphism, 80–1, 101–2
Orsini, Cardinal, 96
Osiris, 164, 166
Ovid, 212
Oxyrynchus, 174

Pallas (*see also* Athena), 37
Pan, 242, 257
Paris, 36–7
Parmenio, 140, 148, 156
Parthenon, 105, 162
Parts of animals, The (of Aristotle), 118–20, 125–7
Pasargada, 142
Pascal, 110, 266
Passion of Christ, the, 42, 45
Patroclus, 150, 275
Pella, 65, 114
Pelopidas, 66
Peloponnesian war, 52–63, 72, 75
Penelope, 217
Pentheus, 40–50
Perdiccas, 161–2
Pergamum, 36, 155, 159, 176–7
Pericles, 54, 56, 60, 62, 80, 99, 136
Persepolis, 142–3
Persia (and Persians), 58, 70, 73–4, 137–9, 142, 147–50, 153–5, 158, 252
Phaedo, The (of Plato), 81, 95–9
Phaedrus, 88
Phaedrus, The (of Plato), 81, 92–3
Pharaoh, 140–1, 147, 155, 166, 174
Pharos, 141, 171–2
Phidias, 181
Philetas, 167, 172
Philip II (of Macedon), 16, 64–73, 114–16, 134–7, 140, 148, 151, 262–3
Phillipics, The (of Demosthenes), 67–9, 73, 115
Philistides, 68
Philotas, 148
Philolaus, 183–5
Phocion, 72
Pindar, 89, 95, 136, 157
Piraeus, 67, 77, 103–4, 162
Plato, 16, 51, 63, 75–115, 117, 134, 144, 149–150, 158, 207, 246–7, 259, 261–2, 264–5, 274–5, 280
  and the after-life, 16–17, 81, 92–102, 107
  and the theory of Forms or Ideas, 86, 89–93, 108, 110, 115
Pliny the Elder, 130, 264
Plotinus, 107–10
Plutarch, 73, 106, 149–52, 154, 157, 162, 185, 203, 206
Polybius, 192, 196, 203
Polyphemus, 230–1, 245
Porphyry, 109
Porus, 144, 156
Poseidon, 217
Priam, 36
Protagoras, 76
Ptolemies, the, 16, 72, 158–80, 184, 192–3, 198, 213
Ptolemy Ceraunus, 165–6
Ptolemy Evergetes II, 174–5
Ptolemy Lâgos, 161, 164
Ptolemy Philadelphus, 164–9, 172, 174–5, 199
Ptolemy Sôter, 160–5, 167, 171–2, 192

Pythagoreanism, 81, 85–6, 92, 98–100, 102, 145, 173, 183, 187, 202, 274–5
Pytheas, 189–97
Pythian games, 68
Pythias, 115–17
Pythocles, 277

Rabelais, 52
Racine, 17
Reformation, the, 109
Renaissance, the, 16, 52, 96, 188, 203, 212, 232
Republic, The (of Plato), 75, 80, 82, 84, 87–8, 149, 262, 265
Researches on Animals, The (of Aristotle), 115, 118, 120, 173
Rhadamanthus, 100
Rome, 16, 146, 155, 164, 177, 192, 198, 201, 203, 264, 275, 278–9
Roxana, 155, 161
Rumania, 104

Salamis, battle of, 143, 150
Salamis (in Cyprus), battle of, 162
Samothrace, victory of, 163
Sardis, 138
Science, 16, 117–33, 181–208
Scythians, 136
Seleucidae, 16, 72, 145, 200
Selencus, 155, 163, 165
Semele, 39
Septuagint, the, 160, 175
Serapis, 162
Shakespeare, 53
Sicilian expedition, 53, 61
Sicily, 53, 58, 60–1, 69, 81–2, 138, 233–7, 240, 243, 246
Sidon, 139
Siwah, 141, 154
Slavery, 17, 70, 105–7, 160, 262–3
Socrates, 75–80, 88, 94–100, 103, 106, 116, 144–5, 246–7, 273
Sogdiana, 143–6, 155
Solon, 84, 159, 193
Sophists, 22, 76, 83
Sophocles, 17, 18, 27, 32, 50, 80, 85, 157
Sostrates, 171
Sparta, 55, 59, 66, 72, 77, 85, 104, 138
Spartacus, 279
Sphacteria, 55
Stagira, 114, 117
Statira, 155
Strabo, 191
Strato, 199
Suetomus, 177
Susa, 142, 153–6
Syene, 195–6
Symposium, The (of Plato), 81, 108
Syracuse, 53, 60, 81–2, 155, 170, 17
235–6

Tarentum, 81, 86
Thales, 107, 181
Thebes, 39, 41, 44, 49, 66, 71–2, 85, 104, 136, 156, 166
Themistocles, 62, 80, 99, 136
Theocritus, 164–8, 171–2, 179, 210, 212–14, 216, 229–45
Theophrastus, 116, 172–4, 199
Thirty Tyrants, the, 77–8
Thomism, 109
Thomson, George, 105
Thrace, 66, 104, 114, 165
Thrasymachus, 83
Thucydides, 16, 52–63, 83, 150, 181
Thule (*see* Norway), 190–2, 253
Tigris, 142, 155
Tiresias, 41, 48
Tragedy, 18, 26, 39, 45, 48, 49, 51
Tragic Chorus, 19–20, 23–4, 30, 33–5, 40–1, 44, 47–8
Tragic hero, 41, 46, 211
Trojans, 32, 37
Troy, 27, 28, 36, 37
Tutelary Deities, 162
Tyre, 139–40, 142

Urban VIII, Pope, 109
U.S.S.R., 85

Vinci, Leonardo da, 203
Virgil, 212, 226–8, 237, 253
Voltaire, 52, 82

Xenophanes, 187
Xenophon, 77, 104, 247, 264

Zeno, 157–8, 261
Zenodorus, 167, 174, 176, 179, 213
Zeus, 37, 39, 88, 93, 110, 119, 140, 152, 165–6, 211, 218, 257, 273
Zeus-Ammon, 141, 147, 154

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